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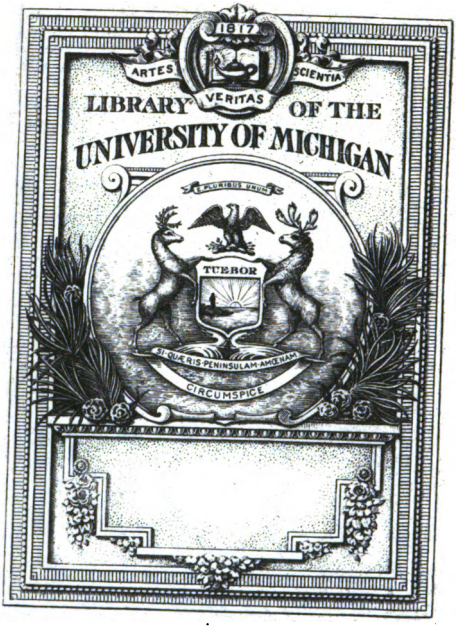

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CHANCE

A TALE IN TWO PARTS

BY

JOSEPH CONRAD

AUTHOR OF

"AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS," "THE SECRET AGENT,"
"UNDER WESTERN EYES," ETC.

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CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

PART II.

THE KNIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

Page

The *Ferndale* 9

CHAPTER II.

Young Powell Sees and Hears 29

CHAPTER III.

Devoted Servants—and the Light of a Flare 60

CHAPTER IV.

Anthony and Flora 97

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

Page
The Great de Barral 127

CHAPTER VI.

"... A Moonless Night, thick with Stars above, very Dark on the Water" 196

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PART II.

THE KNIGHT.

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PART II.

THE KNIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE *FERNDALE*.

I HAVE said that the story of Flora de Barral was imparted to me in stages. At this stage I did not see Marlow for some time. At last, one evening rather early, very soon after dinner, he turned up in my rooms.

I had been waiting for his call primed with a remark which had not occurred to me till after he had gone away.

"I say," I tackled him at once, "how can you be certain that Flora de Barral ever went to sea? After all, the wife of the captain of the *Ferndale*—'the lady that mustn't be disturbed' of the old ship-keeper—may not have been Flora."

"Well, I do know," he said, "if only because I have been keeping in touch with Mr. Powell."

"You have!" I cried. "This is the first I hear of it. And since when?"

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"Why, since the first day. You went up to town leaving me in the inn. I slept ashore. In the morning Mr. Powell came in for breakfast; and after the first awkwardness of meeting a man you have been yarning with overnight had worn off, we discovered a liking for each other."

As I had discovered the fact of their mutual liking before either of them, I was not surprised.

"And so you kept in touch," I said.

"It was not so very difficult. As he was always knocking about the river I hired Dingle's sloop-rigged three-tonner to be more on an equality. Powell was friendly but elusive. I don't think he ever wanted to avoid me. But it is a fact that he used to disappear out of the river in a very mysterious manner sometimes. A man may land anywhere and bolt inland—but what about his five-ton cutter? You can't carry that in your hand like a suit-case.

"Then as suddenly he would reappear in the river, after one had given him up. I did not like to be beaten. That's why I hired Dingle's decked boat. There was just the accommodation in her to sleep a man and a dog. But I had no dog-friend to invite. Fyne's dog who saved Flora de Barral's life is the last dog-friend I had. I was rather lonely cruising about; but that, too, on the river has its charm, sometimes. I chased the mystery of the vanishing Powell dreamily,

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looking about me at the ships, thinking of the girl Flora, of life's chances—and, do you know, it was very simple."

"What was very simple?" I asked innocently.

"The mystery."

"They generally are that," I said.

Marlow eyed me for a moment in a peculiar manner.

"Well, I have discovered the mystery of Powell's disappearances. The fellow used to run into one of these narrow tidal creeks on the Essex shore. These creeks are so inconspicuous that till I had studied the chart pretty carefully I did not know of their existence. One afternoon, I made Powell's boat out, heading into the shore. By the time I got close to the mud-flat his craft had disappeared inland. But I could see the mouth of the creek by then. The tide being on the turn I took the risk of getting stuck in the mud suddenly and headed in. All I had to guide me was the top of the roof of some sort of small building. I got in more by good luck than by good management. The sun had set some time before; my boat glided in a sort of winding ditch between two low grassy banks; on both sides of me was the flatness of the Essex march, perfectly still. All I saw moving was a heron; he was flying low, and disappeared in the murk. Before I had gone half a mile, I was up with the building the roof

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of which I had seen from the river. It looked like a small barn. A row of piles driven into the soft bank in front of it and supporting a few planks made a sort of wharf. All this was black in the falling dusk, and I could just distinguish the whitish ruts of a cart-track stretching over the marsh towards the higher land, far away. Not a sound was to be heard. Against the low streak of light in the sky I could see the mast of Powell's cutter moored to the bank some twenty yards, no more, beyond that black barn or whatever it was. I hailed him with a loud shout. Got no answer. After making fast my boat just astern, I walked along the bank to have a look at Powell's. Being so much bigger than mine she was aground already. Her sails were furled; the slide of her scuttle hatch was closed and padlocked. Powell was gone. He had walked off into that dark, still marsh somewhere. I had not seen a single house anywhere near; there did not seem to be any human habitation for miles; and now as darkness fell denser over the land I couldn't see the glimmer of a single light. However, I supposed that there must be some village or hamlet not very far away; or only one of these mysterious little inns one comes upon sometimes in most unexpected and lonely places.

"The stillness was oppressive. I went back to my boat, made some coffee over a spirit-lamp, devoured a few biscuits, and stretched myself aft, to smoke and

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gaze at the stars. The earth was a mere shadow, formless and silent, and empty, till a bullock turned up from somewhere, quite shadowy too. He came smartly to the very edge of the bank as though he meant to step on board, stretched his muzzle right over my boat, blew heavily once, and walked off contemptuously into the darkness from which he had come. I had not expected a call from a bullock, though a moment's thought would have shown me that there must be lots of cattle and sheep on that marsh. Then everything became still as before. I might have imagined myself arrived on a desert island. In fact, as I reclined smoking a sense of absolute loneliness grew on me. And just as it had become intense, very abruptly and without any preliminary sound I heard firm, quick footsteps on the little wharf. Somebody coming along the cart-track had just stepped at a swinging gait onto the planks. That somebody could only have been Mr. Powell. Suddenly he stopped short, having made out that there were two masts alongside the bank where he had left only one. Then he came on silent on the grass. When I spoke to him he was astonished.

"'Who would have thought of seeing you here!' he exclaimed, after returning my good evening.

"I told him I had run in for company. It was rigorously true.

"'You knew I was here?' he exclaimed.

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"'Of course,' I said. 'I tell you I came in for company.'

"He is a really good fellow," went on Marlow. "And his capacity for astonishment is quickly exhausted, it seems. It was in the most matter-of-fact manner that he said, 'Come on board of me, then; I have here enough supper for two.' He was holding a bulky parcel in the crook of his arm. I did not wait to be asked twice, as you may guess. His cutter has a very neat little cabin, quite big enough for two men not only to sleep but to sit and smoke in. We left the scuttle wide open, of course. As to his provisions for supper, they were not of a luxurious kind. He complained that the shops in the village were miserable. There was a big village within a mile and a half. It struck me he had been very long doing his shopping; but naturally I made no remark. I didn't want to talk at all except for the purpose of setting him going."

"And did you set him going?" I asked.

"I did," said Marlow, composing his features into an impenetrable expression which somehow assured me of his success better than an air of triumph could have done.

"You made him talk?" I said after a silence.

"Yes, I made him . . . about himself."

"And to the point?"

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"If you mean by this," said Marlow, "that it was about the voyage of the *Ferndale,* then again, yes. I brought him to talk about that voyage, which, by-the-bye, was not the first voyage of Flora de Barral. The man himself, as I told you, is simple, and his faculty of wonder not very great. He's one of those people who form no theories about facts. Straightforward people seldom do. Neither have they much penetration. But in this case it did not matter. I—we—have already the inner knowledge. We know the history of Flora de Barral. We know something of Captain Anthony. We have the secret of the situation. The man was intoxicated with the pity and tenderness of his part. Oh yes! Intoxicated is not too strong a word; for you know that love and desire take many disguises. I believe that the girl had been frank with him, with the frankness of women to whom perfect frankness is impossible, because so much of their safety depends on judicious reticences. I am not indulging in cheap sneers. There is necessity in these things. And moreover she could not have spoken with a certain voice in the face of his impetuosity, because she did not have time to understand either the state of her feelings, or the precise nature of what she was doing.

"Had she spoken ever so clearly he was, I take it, too elated to hear her distinctly. I don't mean to imply that he was a fool. Oh dear no! But he had no

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training in the usual conventions, and we must remember that he had no experience whatever of women. He could only have an ideal conception of his position. An ideal is often but a flaming vision of reality.

"To him enters Fyne, wound up, if I may express myself so irreverently, wound up to a high pitch by his wife's interpretation of the girl's letter. He enters with his talk of meanness and cruelty, like a bucket of water on the flame. Clearly a shock. But the effects of a bucket of water are diverse. They depend on the kind of flame. A mere blaze of dry straw, of course . . . but there can be no question of straw there. Anthony of the *Ferndale* was not, could not have been, a straw-stuffed specimen of a man. There are flames a bucket of water sends leaping sky-high.

"We may well wonder what happened when, after Fyne had left him, the hesitating girl went up at last and opened the door of that room where our man, I am certain, was not extinguished. Oh no! Nor cold; whatever else he might have been.

"It is conceivable he might have cried at her in the first moment of humiliation, of exasperation, 'Oh, it's you! Why are you here? If I am so odious to you that you must write to my sister to say so, I give you back your word.' But then, don't you see, it could not have been that. I have the practical certitude that soon afterwards they went together in a hansom to see

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the ship—as agreed. That was my reason for saying that Flora de Barral did go to sea. . . ."

"Yes. It seems conclusive," I agreed. "But even without that—if, as you seem to think, the very desolation of that girlish figure had a sort of perversely seductive charm, making its way through his compassion to his senses (and everything is possible)—then such words could not have been spoken."

"They might have escaped him involuntarily," observed Marlow. "However, a plain fact settles it. They went off together to see the ship."

"Do you conclude from this that nothing whatever was said?" I enquired.

"I should have liked to see the first meeting of their glances upstairs there," mused Marlow. "And perhaps nothing was said. But no man comes out of such a 'wrangle' (as Fyne called it) without showing some traces of it. And you may be sure that a girl so bruised all over would feel the slightest touch of anything resembling coldness. She was mistrustful; she could not be otherwise; for the energy of evil is so much more forcible than the energy of good that she could not help looking still upon her abominable governess as an authority. How could one have expected her to throw off the unholy prestige of that long domination? She could not help believing what she had been told; that she was in some mysterious way odious and unlovable.

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It was cruelly true—*to her*. The oracle of so many years had spoken finally. Only other people did not find her out at once. . . . I would not go so far as to say she believed it altogether. That would be hardly possible. But then haven't the most flattered, the most conceited of us their moments of doubt? Haven't they? Well, I don't know. There may be lucky beings in this world unable to believe any evil of themselves. For my own part I'll tell you that once, many years ago now, it came to my knowledge that a fellow I had been mixed up with in a certain transaction—a clever fellow whom I really despised—was going around telling people that I was a consummate hypocrite. He could know nothing of it. It suited his humour to say so. I had given him no ground for that particular calumny. Yet to this day there are moments when it comes into my mind, and involuntarily I ask myself, 'What if it were true?' It's absurd, but it has on one or two occasions nearly affected my conduct. And yet I was not an impressionable ignorant young girl. I had taken the exact measure of the fellow's utter worthlessness long before. He had never been for me a person of prestige and power, like that awful governess to Flora de Barral. See the might of suggestion? We live at the mercy of a malevolent word. A sound, a mere disturbance of the air, sinks into our very soul sometimes. Flora de Barral had been more astounded than

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convinced by the first impetuosity of Roderick Anthony. She let herself be carried along by a mysterious force which her person had called into being, as her father had been carried away out of his depth by the unexpected power of successful advertising.

"They went on board that morning. The *Ferndale* had just come to her loading berth. The only living creature on board was the ship-keeper—whether the same who had been described to us by Mr. Powell, or another, I don't know. Possibly some other man. He, looking over the side, saw, in his own words, 'the Captain come sailing round the corner of the nearest cargo-shed, in company with a girl.' He lowered the accommodation ladder down onto the jetty . . ."

"How do you know all this?" I interrupted.

Marlow interjected an impatient:

"You shall see by-and-by. . . . Flora went up first, got down on deck and stood stock-still till the captain took her by the arm and led her aft. The ship-keeper let them into the saloon. He had the keys of all the cabins, and stumped in after them. The captain ordered him to open all the doors, every blessed door; state-rooms, passages, pantry, fore-cabin—and then sent him away.

"The *Ferndale* had magnificent accommodation. At the end of a passage leading from the quarter-deck there was a long saloon, its sumptuosity slightly tarnished

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perhaps, but having a grand air of roominess and comfort. The harbour carpets were down, the swinging lamps hung, and everything in its place, even to the silver on the sideboard. Two large stern cabins opened out of it, one on each side of the rudder casing. These two cabins communicated through a small bathroom between them, and one was fitted up as the captain's state-room. The other was vacant, and furnished with armchairs and a round table, more like a room on shore, except for the long curved settee following the shape of the ship's stern. In a dim inclined mirror, Flora caught sight down to the waist of a pale-faced girl in a white straw hat trimmed with roses, distant, shadowy, as if immersed in water, and was surprised to recognise herself in those surroundings. They seemed to her arbitrary, bizarre, strange. Captain Anthony moved on, and she followed him. He showed her the other cabins. He talked all the time loudly in a voice she seemed to have known extremely well for a long time; and yet, she reflected, she had not heard it often in her life. What he was saying she did not quite follow. He was speaking of comparatively indifferent things in a rather moody tone, but she felt it round her like a caress. And when he stopped she could hear, alarming in the sudden silence, the precipitated beating of her heart.

"The ship-keeper dodged about the quarter-deck,

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out of hearing, and trying to keep out of sight. At the same time, taking advantage of the open doors with skill and prudence, he could see the captain and 'that girl' the captain had brought aboard. The captain was showing her round very thoroughly. Through the whole length of the passage, far away aft in the perspective of the saloon the ship-keeper had interesting glimpses of them as they went in and out of the various cabins, crossing from side to side, remaining invisible for a time in one or another of the state-rooms, and then re-appearing again in the distance. The girl, always following the captain, had her sunshade in her hands. Mostly she would hang her head, but now and then she would look up. They had a lot to say to each other, and seemed to forget they weren't alone in the ship. He saw the captain put his hand on her shoulder, and was preparing himself with a certain zest for what might follow, when the 'old man' seemed to recollect himself, and came striding down all the length of the saloon. At this move the ship-keeper promptly dodged out of sight, as you may believe, and heard the captain slam the inner door of the passage. After that disappointment the ship-keeper waited resentfully for them to clear out of the ship. It happened much sooner than he had expected. The girl walked out on deck first. As before she did not look round. She didn't look at anything; and she seemed to be in such a hurry

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to get ashore that she made for the gangway and started down the ladder without waiting for the captain.

"What struck the ship-keeper most was the absent, unseeing expression of the captain, striding after the girl. He passed him, the ship-keeper, without notice, without an order, without so much as a look. The captain had never done so before. Always had a nod and a pleasant word for a man. From this slight the ship-keeper drew a conclusion unfavourable to the strange girl. He gave them time to get down on the wharf before crossing the deck to steal one more look at the pair over the rail. The captain took hold of the girl's arm just before a couple of railway-trucks drawn by a horse came rolling along and hid them from the ship-keeper's sight for good.

"Next day, when the chief mate joined the ship, he told him the tale of the visit, and expressed himself about the girl 'who had got hold of the captain' disparagingly. She didn't look healthy, he explained. 'Shabby clothes, too,' he added spitefully.

"The mate was very much interested. He had been with Anthony for several years, and had won for himself in the course of many long voyages, a footing of familiarity, which was to be expected with a man of Anthony's character. But in that slowly-grown intimacy of the sea, which in its duration and solitude had its unguarded moments, no words had passed, even of the

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most casual, to prepare him for the vision of his captain associated with any kind of girl. His impression had been that women did not exist for Captain Anthony. Exhibiting himself with a girl! A girl! What did he want with a girl? Bringing her on board and showing her round the cabin! That was really a little bit too much. Captain Anthony ought to have known better.

"Franklin (the chief mate's name was Franklin) felt disappointed; almost disillusioned. Silly thing to do! Here was a confounded old ship-keeper set talking. He snubbed the ship-keeper, and tried to think of that insignificant bit of foolishness no more; for it diminished Captain Anthony in his eyes of a jealously devoted subordinate.

"Franklin was over forty; his mother was still alive. She stood in the forefront of all women for him, just as Captain Anthony stood in the forefront of all men. We may suppose that these groups were not very large. He had gone to sea at a very early age. The feeling which caused these two people to partly eclipse the rest of mankind were of course not similar; though in time he had acquired the conviction that he was 'taking care' of them both. The 'old lady' of course had to be looked after as long as she lived. In regard to Captain Anthony, he used to say that: why should he leave him? It wasn't likely that he would come across a better sailor or a better man or a more comfortable

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ship. As to trying to better himself in the way of promotion, commands were not the sort of thing one picked up in the streets, and when it came to that, Captain Anthony was as likely to give him a lift on occasion as anyone in the world.

"From Mr. Powell's description Franklin was a short, thick, black-haired man, bald on the top. His head sunk between the shoulders, his staring prominent eyes and a florid colour, gave him a rather apoplectic appearance. In repose, his congested face had a humorously melancholy expression.

"The ship-keeper having given him up all the keys and having been chased forward with the admonition to mind his own business and not to chatter about what did not concern him, Mr. Franklin went under the poop. He opened one door after another; and, in the saloon, in the captain's state-room and everywhere, he stared anxiously as if expecting to see on the bulkheads, on the deck, in the air, something unusual—sign, mark, emanation, shadow—he hardly knew what—some subtle change wrought by the passage of a girl. But there was nothing. He entered the unoccupied stern cabin and spent some time there unscrewing the two stern ports. In the absence of all material evidences his uneasiness was passing away. With a last glance round he came out and found himself in the presence of his captain advancing from the other end of the saloon.

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"Franklin, at once, looked for the girl. She wasn't to be seen. The captain came up quickly. 'Oh! you are here, Mr. Franklin.' And the mate said, 'I was giving a little air to the place, sir.' Then the captain, his hat pulled down over his eyes, laid his stick on the table and asked in his kind way: 'How did you find your mother, Franklin?'—'The old lady's first-rate, sir, thank you.' And then they had nothing to say to each other. It was a strange and disturbing feeling for Franklin. He, just back from leave, the ship just come to her loading berth, the captain just come on board, and apparently nothing to say! The several questions he had been anxious to ask as to various things which had to be done had slipped out of his mind. He, too, felt as though he had nothing to say.

"The captain, picking up his stick off the table, marched into his state-room and shut the door after him. Franklin remained still for a moment and then started slowly to go on deck. But before he had time to reach the other end of the saloon he heard himself called by name. He turned round. The captain was staring from the doorway of his state-room. Franklin said, 'Yes, sir.' But the captain, silent, leaned a little forward grasping the door handle. So he, Franklin, walked aft keeping his eyes on him. When he had come up quite close he said again, 'Yes, sir?' interrogatively. Still silence. The mate didn't like to be stared

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at in that manner, a manner quite new in his captain, with a defiant and self-conscious stare, like a man who feels ill and dares you to notice it. Franklin gazed at his captain, felt that there was something wrong, and in his simplicity voiced his feelings by asking point-blank:

"'What's wrong, sir?'

"The captain gave a slight start, and the character of his stare changed to a sort of sinister surprise. Franklin grew very uncomfortable, but the captain asked negligently:

"'What makes you think that there's something wrong?'

"'I can't say exactly. You don't look quite yourself, sir,' Franklin owned up.

"'You seem to have a confoundedly piercing eye,' said the captain in such an aggressive tone that Franklin was moved to defend himself.

"'We have been together now over six years, sir, so I suppose I know you a bit by this time. I could see there was something wrong directly you came on board.'

"'Mr. Franklin,' said the captain, 'we have been more than six years together, it is true, but I didn't know you for a reader of faces. You are not a correct reader though. It's very far from being wrong. You understand? As far from being wrong as it can very

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well be. It ought to teach you not to make rash surmises. You should leave that to the shore people. They are great hands at spying at something wrong. I daresay they know what they have made of the world. A dam' poor job of it and that's plain. It's a confoundedly ugly place, Mr. Franklin. You don't know anything of it? Well—no, we sailors don't. Only now and then one of us runs against something cruel or underhand, enough to make your hair stand on end. And when you do see a piece of their wickedness you find that to set it right is not so easy as it looks. . . . Oh! I called you back to tell you that there will be a lot of workmen, joiners and all that, sent down on board first thing to-morrow morning to start making alterations in the cabin. You will see to it that they don't loaf. There isn't much time.'

"Franklin was impressed by this unexpected lecture upon the wickedness of the solid world surrounded by the salt, uncorruptible waters on which he and his captain had dwelt all their lives in happy innocence. What he could not understand was why it should have been delivered, and what connection it could have with such a matter as the alterations to be carried out in the cabin. The work did not seem to him to be called for in such a hurry. What was the use of altering anything? It was a very good accommodation, spacious, well-distributed, on a rather old-fashioned plan, and

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with its decorations somewhat tarnished. But a dab of varnish, a touch of gilding here and there, was all that was necessary. As to comfort, it could not be improved by any alterations. He resented the notion of change; but he said dutifully that he would keep his eye on the workmen if the captain would only let him know what was the nature of the work he had ordered to be done.

"'You'll find a note of it on this table. I'll leave it for you as I go ashore,' said Captain Anthony hastily. Franklin thought there was no more to hear, and made a movement to leave the saloon. But the captain continued after a slight pause, 'You will be surprised, no doubt, when you look at it. There'll be a good many alterations. It's on account of a lady coming with us. I am going to get married, Mr. Franklin!'"

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CHAPTER II.

YOUNG POWELL SEES AND HEARS.

"You remember," went on Marlow, "how I feared that Mr. Powell's want of experience would stand in his way of appreciating the unusual. The unusual I had in my mind was something of a very subtle sort: the unusual in marital relations. I may well have doubted the capacity of a young man too much concerned with the creditable performance of his professional duties to observe what in the nature of things is not easily observable in itself, and still less so under the special circumstances. In the majority of ships a second officer has not many points of contact with the captain's wife. He sits at the same table with her at meals, generally speaking; he may now and then be addressed more or less kindly on insignificant matters, and have the opportunity to show her some small attentions on deck. And that is all. Under such conditions, signs can be seen only by a sharp and practised eye. I am alluding now to troubles which are subtle often to the extent of

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not being understood by the very hearts they devastate or uplift.

"Yes, Mr. Powell, whom the chance of his name had thrown upon the floating stage of that tragi-comedy would have been perfectly useless for my purpose if the unusual of an obvious kind had not aroused his attention from the first.

"We know how he joined that ship so suddenly offered to his anxious desire to make a real start in his profession. He had come on board breathless with the hurried winding up of his shore affairs, accompanied by two horrible nightbirds, escorted by a dock policeman on the make, received by an asthmatic shadow of a ship-keeper, warned not to make a noise in the darkness of the passage because the captain and his wife were already on board. That in itself was already somewhat unusual. Captains and their wives do not, as a rule, join a moment sooner than is necessary. They prefer to spend the last moments with their friends and relations. A ship in one of London's older docks with their restrictions as to lights and so on is not the place for a happy evening. Still, as the tide served at six in the morning, one could understand them coming on board the evening before.

"Just then young Powell felt as if anybody ought to be glad enough to be quit of the shore. We know he

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was an orphan from a very early age, without brothers or sisters—no near relations of any kind, I believe, except that aunt who had quarrelled with his father. No affection stood in the way of the quiet satisfaction with which he thought that now all the worries were over, that there was nothing before him but duties, that he knew what he would have to do as soon as the dawn broke and for a long succession of days. A most soothing certitude. He enjoyed it in the dark, stretched out in his bunk with his new blankets pulled over him. Some clock ashore beyond the dock-gates struck two. And then he heard nothing more, because he went off into a light sleep from which he woke up with a start. He had not taken his clothes off, it was hardly worth while. He jumped up and went on deck.

"The morning was clear, colourless, grey overhead; the dock like a sheet of darkling glass crowded with upside-down reflections of warehouses, of hulls and masts of silent ships. Rare figures moved here and there on the distant quays. A knot of men stood alongside with clothes-bags and wooden chests at their feet. Others were coming down the lane between tall blind walls, surrounding a hand-cart loaded with more bags and boxes. It was the crew of the *Ferndale*. They began to come on board. He scanned their faces as they passed forward filling the roomy deck with the shuffle of their footsteps and the murmur of voices, like

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the awakening to life of a world about to be launched into space.

"Far away down the clear glassy stretch in the middle of the long dock Mr. Powell watched the tugs coming in quietly through the open gates. A subdued firm voice behind him interrupted this contemplation. It was Franklin, the thick chief mate, who was addressing him with a watchful appraising stare of his prominent black eyes: 'You'd better take a couple of these chaps with you and look out for her aft. We are going to cast off.'

"'Yes, sir,' Powell said with proper alacrity; but for a moment they remained looking at each other fixedly. Something like a faint smile altered the set of the chief mate's lips just before he moved off forward with his brisk step.

"Mr. Powell, getting up on the poop, touched his cap to Captain Anthony, who was there alone. He tells me that it was only then that he saw his captain for the first time. The day before, in the shipping-office, what with the bad light and his excitement at this berth obtained as if by a brusque and unscrupulous miracle, did not count. He had then seemed to him much older and heavier. He was surprised at the lithe figure, broad of shoulder, narrow at the hips, the fire of the deep-set eyes, the springiness of the walk. The captain gave him a steady stare, nodded slightly, and

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went on pacing the poop with an air of not being aware of what was going on, his head rigid, his movements rapid.

"Powell stole several glances at him with a curiosity very natural under the circumstances. He wore a short grey jacket and a grey cap. In the light of the dawn, growing more limpid rather than brighter, Powell noticed the slightly sunken cheeks under the trimmed beard, the perpendicular fold on the forehead, something hard and set about the mouth.

"It was too early yet for the work to have begun in the dock. The water gleamed placidly, no movement anywhere on the long straight lines of the quays, no one about to be seen except the few dock hands busy alongside the *Ferndale,* knowing their work, mostly silent or exchanging a few words in low tones as if they, too, had been aware of that lady 'who mustn't be disturbed.' The *Ferndale* was the only ship to leave that tide. The others seemed still asleep, without a sound, and only here and there a figure, coming up on the forecastle, leaned on the rail to watch the proceedings idly. Without trouble and fuss and almost without a sound was the *Ferndale* leaving the land, as if stealing away. Even the tugs, now with their engines stopped, were approaching her without a ripple, the burly-looking paddle-boat sheering forward, while the other, a screw, smaller and of slender shape, made for her quarter so gently that

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she did not divide the smooth water, but seemed to glide on its surface as if on a sheet of plate glass, a man in her bow, the master at the wheel visible only from the waist upwards above the white screen of the bridge, both of them so still-eyed as to fascinate young Powell into curious self-forgetfulness and immobility. He was steeped, sunk in the general quietness, remembering the statement 'she's a lady that mustn't be disturbed,' and repeating to himself idly: 'No. She won't be disturbed. She won't be disturbed.' Then the first loud words of that morning breaking that strange hush of departure with a sharp hail: 'Look out for that line there,' made him start. The line whizzed past his head, one of the sailors aft caught it, and there was an end to the fascination, to the quietness of spirit which had stolen on him at the very moment of departure. From that moment till two hours afterwards, when the ship was brought up in one of the lower reaches of the Thames off an apparently uninhabited shore, near some sort of inlet where nothing but two anchored barges flying a red flag could be seen, Powell was too busy to think of the lady 'that mustn't be disturbed,' or of his captain—or of anything else unconnected with his immediate duties. In fact, he had no occasion to go on the poop, or even look that way much; but while the ship was about to anchor, casting his eyes in that direction, he received an absurd impression that his captain

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(he was up there, of course), was sitting on both sides of the aftermost skylight at once. He was too occupied to reflect on this curious delusion, this phenomenon of seeing double as though he had had a drop too much. He only smiled at himself.

"As often happens after a grey daybreak the sun had risen in a warm and glorious splendour above the smooth immense gleam of the enlarged estuary. Wisps of mist floated like trails of luminous dust, and in the dazzling reflections of water and vapour, the shores had the murky semi-transparent darkness of shadows cast mysteriously from below. Powell, who had sailed out of London all his young seaman's life, told me that it was then, in a moment of entranced vision an hour or so after sunrise, that the river was revealed to him for all time, like a fair face often seen before, which is suddenly perceived to be the expression of an inner and unsuspected beauty, of that something unique and only its own which rouses a passion of wonder and fidelity and an unappeasable memory of its charm. The hull of the *Ferndale,* swung head to the eastward, caught the light, her tall spars and rigging steeped in a bath of red-gold, from the water-line full of glitter to the trucks slight and gleaming against the delicate expanse of the blue.

"'Time we had a mouthful to eat,' said a voice at his side. It was Mr. Franklin, the chief mate, with his

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head sunk between his shoulders, and melancholy eyes. 'Let the men have their breakfast, bo'sun,' he went on, 'and have the fire out in the galley in half an hour at the latest, so that we can call these barges of explosives alongside. Come along, young man. I don't know your name. Haven't seen the Captain, to speak to, since yesterday afternoon when he rushed off to pick up a second mate somewhere. How did he get you?'

"Young Powell, a little shy notwithstanding the friendly disposition of the other, answered him smilingly, aware somehow that there was something marked in this inquisitiveness, natural, after all—something anxious. His name was Powell, and he was put in the way of this berth by Mr. Powell, the shipping-master. He blushed.

"'Ah, I see. Well, you have been smart in getting ready. The ship-keeper, before he went away, told me you joined at one o'clock. I didn't sleep on board last night. Not I. There was a time when I never cared to leave this ship for more than a couple of hours in the evening, even while in London, but now, since——'

"He checked himself with a roll of his prominent eyes towards that youngster, that stranger. Meantime, he was leading the way across the quarter-deck under the poop into the long passage with the door of the saloon at the far end. It was shut. But Mr. Franklin

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did not go so far. After passing the pantry he opened suddenly a door on the left of the passage to Powell's great surprise.

"'Our mess-room,' he said, entering a small cabin painted white, bare, lighted from part of the foremost skylight, and furnished only with a table and two settees with movable backs. 'That surprises you? Well, it isn't usual. And it wasn't so in this ship either, before. It's only since——'

"He checked himself again. 'Yes. Here we shall feed, you and I, facing each other for the next twelve months or more—God knows how much more! The bo'sun keeps the deck at meal-times in fine weather.'

"He talked not exactly wheezing, but like a man whose breath is somewhat short, and the spirit (young Powell could not help thinking) embittered by some mysterious grievance.

"There was enough of the unusual there to be recognised even by Powell's inexperience. The officers kept out of the cabin against the custom of the service, and then this sort of accent in the mate's talk. Franklin did not seem to expect conversational ease from the new second mate. He made several remarks about the old, deploring the accident. Awkward. Very awkward this thing to happen on the very eve of sailing.

"'Collar-bone and arm broken,' he sighed. 'Sad,

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very sad. Did you notice if the captain was at all affected? Eh? Must have been.'

"Before this congested face, these globular eyes turned yearningly upon him, young Powell (one must keep in mind he was but a youngster then) who could not remember any signs of visible grief, confessed with an embarrassed laugh that, owing to the suddenness of this lucky chance coming to him, he was not in a condition to notice the state of other people.

"'I was so pleased to get a ship at last,' he murmured, further disconcerted by the sort of pent-up gravity in Mr. Franklin's aspect.

"'One man's food another man's poison,' the mate remarked. 'That holds true beyond mere victuals. I suppose it didn't occur to you that it was a dam' poor way for a good man to be knocked out.'

"Mr. Powell admitted openly that he had not thought of that. He was ready to admit that it was very reprehensible of him. But Franklin had no intention apparently to moralise. He did not fall silent either. His further remarks were to the effect that there had been a time when Captain Anthony would have showed more than enough concern for the least thing happening to one of his officers. Yes, there had been a time!

"'And mind,' he went on, laying down suddenly a half-consumed piece of bread and butter and raising his voice, 'poor Mathews was the second man the longest

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on board. I was the first. He joined a month later—about the same time as the steward by a few days. The bo'sun and the carpenter came the voyage after. Steady men. Still here. No good man need ever have thought of leaving the *Ferndale* unless he were a fool. Some good men are fools. Don't know when they are well off. I mean the best of good men; men that you would do anything for. They go on for years, then all of a sudden——'

"Our young friend listened to the mate with a queer sense of discomfort growing on him. For it was as though Mr. Franklin were thinking aloud, and putting him into the delicate position of an unwilling eavesdropper. But there was in the mess-room another listener. It was the steward, who had come in carrying a tin coffee-pot with a long handle, and stood quietly by: a man with a middle-aged, sallow face, long features, heavy eyelids, a soldierly grey moustache. His body encased in a short black jacket with narrow sleeves, his long legs in very tight trousers, made up an agile, youthful, slender figure. He moved forward suddenly, and interrupted the mate's monologue.

"'More coffee, Mr. Franklin? Nice fresh lot. Piping hot. I am going to give breakfast to the saloon directly, and the cook is raking his fire out. Now's your chance.'

"The mate who, on account of his peculiar build,

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could not turn his head freely, twisted his thick trunk slightly, and ran his black eyes in the corners towards the steward.

"'And is the precious pair of them out?' he growled.

"The steward, pouring out the coffee into the mate's cup, muttered moodily but distinctly: 'The lady wasn't when I was laying the table.'

"Powell's ears were fine enough to detect something hostile in this reference to the Captain's wife. For of what other person could they be speaking? The steward added with a gloomy sort of fairness: 'But she will be before I bring the dishes in. She never gives that sort of trouble. That she doesn't.'

"'No. Not in that way,' Mr. Franklin agreed, and then both he and the steward, after glancing at Powell —and the stranger to the ship—said nothing more.

"But this had been enough to rouse his curiosity. Curiosity is natural to man. Of course it was not a malevolent curiosity which, if not exactly natural, is to be met fairly frequently in men and perhaps more frequently in women—especially if a woman be in question; and that woman under a cloud, in a manner of speaking. For under a cloud Flora de Barral was fated to be even at sea. Yes. Even that sort of darkness which attends a woman for whom there is no clear place in the world hung over her. Yes. Even at sea!

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"And this is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage. As a matter of fact, almost all women have all that—of their own kind. But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women. And it's no use talking of opportunities, either. I know that some of them do talk of it. But not the genuine women. Those know better. Nothing can beat a true woman for a clear vision of reality; I would say a cynical vision if I were not afraid of wounding your chivalrous feelings—for which, by-the-bye, women are not so grateful as you may think, to fellows of your kind. . . ."

"Upon my word, Marlow," I cried, "what are you flying out at me for like this? I wouldn't use an ill-sounding word about women, but what right have you to imagine that I am looking for gratitude?"

Marlow raised a soothing hand.

"There! There! I take back the ill-sounding word, with the remark, though, that cynicism seems to me a word invented by hypocrites. But let that pass. As to women, they know that the clamour for opportunities for them to become something which they cannot be is as reasonable as if mankind at large started asking for opportunities of winning immortality in this world, in which

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death is the very condition of life. You must understand that I am not talking here of material existence. That naturally is implied; but you won't maintain that a woman who, say, enlisted, for instance (there have been cases) has conquered her place in the world. She has only got her living in it—which is quite meritorious, but not quite the same thing.

"All these reflections which arise from my picking up the thread of Flora de Barral's existence did not, I am certain, present themselves to Mr. Powell—not the Mr. Powell we know taking solitary week-end cruises in the estuary of the Thames (with mysterious dashes into lonely creeks) but to the young Mr. Powell, the chance second officer of the ship *Ferndale,* commanded (and for the most part owned) by Roderick Anthony, the son of the poet—you know. A Mr. Powell, much slenderer than our robust friend is now, with the bloom of innocence not quite rubbed off his smooth cheeks, and apt not only to be interested but also to be surprised by the experience life was holding in store for him. This would account for his remembering so much of it with considerable vividness. For instance, the impressions attending his first breakfast on board the *Ferndale,* both visual and mental, were as fresh to him as if received yesterday.

"The surprise, it is easy to understand, would arise from the inability to interpret aright the signs which

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experience (a thing mysterious in itself) makes to our understanding and emotions. For it is never more than that. Our experience never gets into our blood and bones. It always remains outside of us. That's why we look with wonder at the past. And this persists even when from practice and through growing callousness of fibre we come to the point when nothing that we meet in that rapid blinking stumble across a flick of sunshine—which our life is—nothing, I say, which we run against surprises us any more. Not at the time, I mean. If, later on, we recover the faculty with some such exclamation: 'Well! Well! I'll be hanged if I ever, . . .' it is probably because this very thing that there should be a past to look back upon, other people's, is very astounding in itself when one has the time, a fleeting and immense instant to think of it . . ."

I was on the point of interrupting Marlow when he stopped of himself, his eyes fixed on vacancy, or—perhaps—(I wouldn't be too hard on him) on a vision. He has the habit, or, say, the fault, of defective mantelpiece clocks, of suddenly stopping in the very fulness of the tick. If you have ever lived with a clock afflicted with that perversity, you know how vexing it is—such a stoppage. I was vexed with Marlow. He was smiling faintly while I waited. He even laughed a little. And then I said acidly:

"Am I to understand that you have ferreted out something comic in the history of Flora de Barral?"

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"Comic!" he exclaimed. "No! What makes you say? . . . Oh, I laughed—did I? But don't you know that people laugh at absurdities that are very far from being comic? Didn't you read the latest books about laughter written by philosophers, psychologists? There is a lot of them . . ."

"I daresay there has been a lot of nonsense written about laughter—and tears, too, for that matter," I said impatiently.

"They say," pursued the unabashed Marlow, "that we laugh from a sense of superiority. Therefore, observe, simplicity, honesty, warmth of feeling, delicacy of heart and of conduct, self-confidence, magnanimity are laughed at, because the presence of these traits in a man's character often puts him into difficult, cruel or absurd situations, and makes us, the majority who are fairly free as a rule from these peculiarities, feel pleasantly superior."

"Speak for yourself," I said. "But have you discovered all these fine things in the story; or has Mr. Powell discovered them to you in his artless talk? Have you two been having good healthy laughs together? Come! Are your sides aching yet, Marlow?"

Marlow took no offence at my banter. He was quite serious.

"I should not like to say off-hand how much of

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that there was," he pursued with amusing caution. "But there was a situation, tense enough for the signs of it to give many surprises to Mr. Powell—neither of them shocking in itself, but with a cumulative effect which made the whole unforgetable in the detail of its progress. And the first surprise came very soon, when the explosives (to which he owed his sudden chance of engagement)—dynamite in cases and blasting powder in barrels—taken on board, main hatch battened for sea, cook restored to his functions in the galley, anchor fished and the tug ahead, rounding the South Foreland, and with the sun sinking clear and red down the purple vista of the channel, he went on the poop, on duty, it is true, but with time to take the first freer breath in the busy day of departure. The pilot was still on board, who gave him first a silent glance, and then passed an insignificant remark before resuming his lounging to and fro between the steering wheel and the binnacle. Powell took his station modestly at the break of the poop. He had noticed across the skylight a head in a grey cap. But when, after a time, he crossed over to the other side of the deck he discovered that it was not the captain's head at all. He became aware of grey hairs curling over the nape of the neck. How could he have made that mistake? But on board ship away from the land one does not expect to come upon a stranger.

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"Powell walked past the man. A thin, somewhat sunken face, with a tightly closed mouth, stared at the distant French coast, vague like a suggestion of solid darkness, lying abeam beyond the evening light reflected from the level waters, themselves growing more sombre than the sky; a stare, across which Powell had to pass and did pass with a quick side glance, noting its immovable stillness. His passage disturbed those eyes no more than if he had been as immaterial as a ghost. And this failure of his person in producing an impression affected him strangely. Who could that old man be?

"He was so curious that he even ventured to ask the pilot in a low voice. The pilot turned out to be a good-natured specimen of his kind, condescending, sententious. He had been down to his meals in the main cabin, and had something to impart.

"'That? Queer fish—eh? Mrs. Anthony's father. I've been introduced to him in the cabin at breakfast time. Name of Smith. Wonder if he has all his wits about him. They take him about with them, it seems. Don't look very happy—eh?'

"Then, changing his tone abruptly, he desired Powell to get all hands on deck and make sail on the ship. 'I shall be leaving you in half an hour. You'll have plenty of time to find out all about the old gent,' he added with a thick laugh.

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"In the secret emotion of giving his first order as a fully responsible officer, young Powell forgot the very existence of that old man in a moment. The following days, in the interest of getting in touch with the ship, with the men in her, with his duties, in the rather anxious period of settling down, his curiosity slumbered; for of course the pilot's few words had not extinguished it.

"This settling down was made easy for him by the friendly character of his immediate superior—the chief. Powell could not defend himself from some sympathy for that thick, bald man, comically shaped, with his crimson complexion and something pathetic in the rolling of his very movable black eyes in an apparently immovable head, who was so tactfully ready to take his competency for granted.

"There can be nothing more reassuring to a young man tackling his life's work for the first time. Mr. Powell, his mind at ease about himself, had time to observe the people around with friendly interest. Very early in the beginning of the passage, he had discovered with some amusement that the marriage of Captain Anthony was resented by those to whom Powell (conscious of being looked upon as something of an outsider) referred in his mind as 'the old lot.'

"They had the funny, regretful glances, intonations, nods of men who had seen other, better times. What

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difference it could have made to the bo'sun and the carpenter Powell could not very well understand. Yet these two pulled long faces and even gave hostile glances to the poop. The cook and the steward might have been more directly concerned. But the steward used to remark on occasion, 'Oh, she gives no extra trouble,' with scrupulous fairness of the most gloomy kind. He was rather a silent man with a great sense of his personal worth which made his speeches guarded. The cook, a neat man with fair side whiskers, who had been only three years in the ship, seemed the least concerned. He was even known to have enquired once or twice as to the success of some of his dishes with the captain's wife. This was considered a sort of disloyal falling away from the ruling feeling.

"The mate's annoyance was yet the easiest to understand. As he let it out to Powell before the first week of the passage was over: 'You can't expect me to be pleased at being chucked out of the saloon as if I weren't good enough to sit down to meat with that woman.' But he hastened to add: 'Don't you think I'm blaming the captain. He isn't a man to be found fault with. You, Mr. Powell, are too young yet to understand such matters.'

"Some considerable time afterwards, at the end of a conversation of that aggrieved sort, he enlarged a little more by repeating: 'Yes! You are too young to

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understand these things. I don't say you haven't plenty of sense. You are doing very well here. Jolly sight better than I expected, though I liked your looks from the first.'

"It was in the trade-winds, at night, under a velvety, bespangled sky; a great multitude of stars watching the shadows of the sea gleaming mysteriously in the wake of the ship; while the leisurely swishing of the water to leeward was like a drowsy comment on her progress. Mr. Powell expressed his satisfaction by a half-bashful laugh. The mate mused on: 'And of course you haven't known the ship as she used to be. She was more than a home to a man. She was not like any other ship; and Captain Anthony was not like any other master to sail with. Neither is she now. But before one never had a care in the world as to her—and as to him, too. No, indeed, there was never anything to worry about.'

"Young Powell couldn't see what there was to worry about even then. The serenity of the peaceful night seemed as vast as all space, and as enduring as eternity itself. It's true the sea is an uncertain element, but no sailor remembers this in the presence of its bewitching power any more than a lover ever thinks of the proverbial inconstancy of women. And Mr. Powell, being young, thought naïvely that the captain being married, there could be no occasion for anxiety as to

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his condition. I suppose that to him life, perhaps not so much his own as that of others, was something still in the nature of a fairy-tale with a 'they lived happy ever after' termination. We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories. Powell felt in that way the more because the captain of a ship at sea is a remote, inaccessible creature, something like a prince of a fairy-tale, alone of his kind, depending on nobody, not to be called to account except by powers practically invisible and so distant, that they might well be looked upon as supernatural for all that the rest of the crew knows of them, as a rule.

"So he did not understand the aggrieved attitude of the mate—or rather he understood it obscurely as a result of simple causes which did not seem to him adequate. He would have dismissed all this out of his mind with a contemptuous: 'What the devil do I care?' if the captain's wife herself had not been so young. To see her the first time had been something of a shock to him. He had some preconceived ideas as to captain's wives which, while he did not believe the testimony of his eyes, made him open them very wide. He had stared till the captain's wife noticed it plainly and turned her face away. Captain's wife! That girl covered with rugs in a long chair. Cap-

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tain's . . .! He gasped mentally. It had never occurred to him that a captain's wife could be anything but a woman to be described as stout or thin, as jolly or crabbed, but always mature, and even, in comparison with his own years, frankly old. But this! It was a sort of moral upset as though he had discovered a case of abduction or something as surprising as that. You understand that nothing is more disturbing than the upsetting of a preconceived idea. Each of us arranges the world according to his own notion of the fitness of things. To behold a girl where your average mediocre imagination had placed a comparatively old woman may easily become one of the strongest shocks . . ."

Marlow paused, smiling to himself.

"Powell remained impressed after all these years by the very recollection," he continued in a voice, amused perhaps but not mocking. "He said to me only the other day with something like the first awe of that discovery lingering in his tone—he said to me: 'Why, she seemed so young, so girlish, that I looked round for some woman which would be the captain's wife, though of course I knew there was no other woman on board that voyage.' The voyage before, it seems, there had been the steward's wife to act as maid to Mrs. Anthony; but she was not taken that time for some reason he didn't know. Mrs. An-

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thony . . . ! If it hadn't been the captain's wife he would have referred to her mentally as a kid, he said. I suppose there must be a sort of divinity hedging in a captain's wife (however incredible) which prevented him applying to her that contemptuous definition in the secret of his thoughts.

"I asked him when this had happened; and he told me that it was three days after parting from the tug, just outside the channel—to be precise. A head wind had set in with unpleasant damp weather. He had come up to leeward of the poop, still feeling very much of a stranger, and an untried officer, at six in the evening to take his watch. To see her was quite as unexpected as seeing a vision. When she turned away her head he recollected himself and dropped his eyes. What he could see then was only, close to the long chair on which she reclined, a pair of long, thin legs ending in black cloth boots tucked in close to the skylight seat. Whence he concluded that the 'old gentleman,' who wore a grey cap like the captain's, was sitting by her—his daughter. In his first astonishment he had stopped dead short, with the consequence that now he felt very much abashed at having betrayed his surprise. But he couldn't very well turn tail and bolt off the poop. He had come there on duty. So, still with downcast eyes, he made his way past them. Only when he got as far as the wheel-grating did he

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look up. She was hidden from him by the back of her deck-chair; but he had the view of the owner of the thin, aged legs seated on the skylight, his clean-shaved cheek, his thin compressed mouth with a hollow in each corner, the sparse grey locks escaping from under the tweed cap, and curling slightly on the collar of the coat. He leaned forward a little over Mrs. Anthony, but they were not talking. Captain Anthony, walking with a springy hurried gait on the other side of the poop from end to end, gazed straight before him. Young Powell might have thought that his captain was not aware of his presence either. However, he knew better, and for that reason spent a most uncomfortable hour motionless by the compass before his captain stopped in his swift pacing and with an almost visible effort made some remark to him about the weather in a low voice. Before Powell, who was startled, could find a word of answer, the captain swung off again on his endless tramp with a fixed gaze. And till the supper bell rang silence dwelt over that poop like an evil spell. The captain walked up and down looking straight before him, the helmsman steered, looking upwards at the sails, the old gent on the skylight looked down on his daughter—and Mr. Powell confessed to me that he didn't know where to look, feeling as though he had blundered in where he had no business — which was absurd. At last he

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fastened his eyes on the compass card, took refuge, in spirit, inside the binnacle. He felt chilled more than he should have been by the chilly dusk falling on the muddy green sea of the soundings from a smoothly clouded sky. A fitful wind swept the cheerless waste, and the ship, hauled up so close as to check her way, seemed to progress by languid fits and starts against the short seas which swept along her sides with a snarling sound.

"Young Powell thought that this was the dreariest evening aspect of the sea he had ever seen. He was glad when the other occupants of the poop left it at the sound of the bell. The captain first, with a sudden swerve in his walk towards the companion, and not even looking once towards his wife and his wife's father. Those two got up and moved towards the companion, the old gent very erect, his thin locks stirring gently about the nape of his neck, and carrying the rugs over his arm. The girl who was Mrs. Anthony went down first. The murky twilight had settled in deep shadow on her face. She looked at Mr. Powell in passing. He thought that she was very pale. Cold perhaps. The old gent stopped a moment, thin and stiff, before the young man, and in a voice which was low but distinct enough, and without any particular accent—not even of enquiry—he said:

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"'You are the new second officer, I believe.'

"Mr. Powell answered in the affirmative, wondering if this were a friendly overture. He had noticed that Mr. Smith's eyes had a sort of inward look as though he had disliked or disdained his surroundings. The captain's wife had disappeared then down the companion stairs. Mr. Smith said 'Ah!' and waited a little longer to put another question in his incurious voice.

"'And did you know the man who was here before you?'

"'No,' said young Powell, 'I didn't know anybody belonging to this ship before I joined.'

"'He was much older than you. Twice your age. Perhaps more. His hair was iron grey. Yes. Certainly more.'

"The low, repressed voice paused, but the old man did not move away. He added: 'Isn't it unusual?'

"Mr. Powell was surprised not only by being engaged in conversation, but also by its character. It might have been the suggestion of the word uttered by this old man, but it was distinctly at that moment that he became aware of something unusual not only in this encounter but generally around him, about everybody, in the atmosphere. The very sea, with short flashes of foam bursting out here and there in the gloomy distances, the unchangeable, safe sea sheltering a man.

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from all passions, except its own anger, seemed queer to the quick glance he threw to windward where the already effaced horizon traced no reassuring limit to the eye. In the expiring, diffused twilight, and before the clouded night dropped its mysterious veil, it was the immensity of space made visible—almost palpable. Young Powell felt it. He felt it in the sudden sense of his isolation; the trustworthy, powerful ship of his first acquaintance reduced to a speck, to something almost undistinguishable, the mere support for the soles of his two feet before that unexpected old man becoming so suddenly articulate in a darkening universe.

"It took him a moment or so to seize the drift of the question. He repeated slowly: 'Unusual. . . . Oh, you mean for an elderly man to be the second of a ship. I don't know. There are a good many of us who don't get on. He didn't get on, I suppose.'

"The other, his head bowed a little, had the air of listening with acute attention.

"'And now he has been taken to the hospital,' he said.

"'I believe so. Yes. I remember Captain Anthony saying so in the shipping-office.'

"'Possibly about to die,' went on the old man, in his careful deliberate tone. 'And perhaps glad enough to die.'

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"Mr. Powell was young enough to be startled at the suggestion, which sounded confidential and blood-curdling in the dusk. He said sharply that it was not very likely, as if defending the absent victim of the accident from an unkind aspersion. He felt, in fact, indignant. The other emitted a short stifled laugh of a conciliatory nature. The second bell rang under the poop. He made a movement at the sound, but lingered.

"'What I said was not meant seriously,' he murmured, with that strange air of fearing to be overheard. 'Not in this case. I know the man.'

"The occasion, or rather the want of occasion, for this conversation, had sharpened the perceptions of the unsophisticated second officer of the *Ferndale*. He was alive to the slightest shade of tone, and felt as if this 'I know the man' should have been followed by a 'he was no friend of mine.' But after the shortest possible break the old gentleman continued to murmur distinctly and evenly:

"'Whereas you have never seen him. Nevertheless, when you have gone through as many years as I have, you will understand how an event putting an end to one's existence may not be altogether unwelcome. Of course there are stupid accidents. And even then one needn't be very angry. What is it to be deprived of life? It's soon done. But what would you think of

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the feelings of a man who should have had his life stolen from him? Cheated out of it, I say!'

"He ceased abruptly, and remained still long enough for the astonished Powell to stammer out an indistinct: 'What do you mean? I don't understand.' Then, with a low 'Good night' glided a few steps, and sank through the shadow of the companion into the lamp-light below which did not reach higher than the turn of the staircase.

"The strange words, the cautious tone, the whole person left a strong uneasiness in the mind of Mr. Powell. He started walking the poop in great mental confusion. He felt all adrift. This was funny talk and no mistake. And this cautious low tone as though he were watched by someone was more than funny. The young second officer hesitated to break the established rule of every ship's discipline; but at last could not resist the temptation of getting hold of some other human being, and spoke to the man at the wheel.

"'Did you hear what this gentleman was saying to me?'

"'No, sir,' answered the sailor quietly. Then, encouraged by this evidence of laxity in his officer, made bold to add, 'A queer fish, sir.' This was tentative, and Mr. Powell, busy with his own view, not saying

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anything, he ventured farther. 'They are more like passengers. One sees some queer passengers.'

"'Who are like passengers?' asked Powell gruffly.

"'Why, these two, sir.'

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CHAPTER III.

DEVOTED SERVANTS—AND THE LIGHT OF A FLARE.

"YOUNG Powell thought to himself: 'The men, too, are noticing it.' Indeed, the captain's behaviour to his wife and to his wife's father was noticeable enough. It was as if they had been a pair of not very congenial passengers. But perhaps it was not always like that. The captain might have been put out by something.

"When the aggrieved Franklin came on deck Mr. Powell made a remark to that effect. For his curiosity was aroused.

"The mate grumbled 'Seems to you? . . . Put out? . . . eh?' He buttoned his thick jacket up to the throat, and only then added a gloomy 'Aye, likely enough,' which discouraged further conversation. But no encouragement would have induced the newly-joined second mate to enter the way of confidences. His was an instinctive prudence. Powell did not know why it was he had resolved to keep his own counsel as to his colloquy with Mr. Smith. But

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his curiosity did not slumber. Some time afterwards, again at the relief of watches, in the course of a little talk, he mentioned Mrs. Anthony's father quite casually, and tried to find out from the mate who he was.

"'It would take a clever man to find that out, as things are on board now,' Mr. Franklin said, unexpectedly communicative. 'The first I saw of him was when she brought him alongside in a four-wheeler one morning about half-past eleven. The captain had come on board early, and was down in the cabin that had been fitted out for him. Did I tell you that if you want the captain for anything you must stamp on the port side of the deck? That's so. This ship is not only unlike what she used to be, but she is like no other ship, anyhow. Did you ever hear of the captain's room being on the port side? Both of them stern cabins have been fitted up afresh like a blessed palace. A gang of people from some tip-top West-End house were fussing here on board with hangings and furniture for a fortnight, as if the Queen were coming with us. Of course the starboard cabin is the bedroom one, but the poor captain hangs out to port on a couch, so that in case we want him on deck at night, Mrs. Anthony should not be startled. Nervous! Phoo! A woman who marries a sailor and makes up her mind to come to sea should have no blamed jumpiness about her, I say.

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But never mind. Directly the old cab pointed round the corner of the warehouse I called out to the captain that his lady was coming aboard. He answered me, but as I didn't see him coming, I went down the gangway myself to help her alight. She jumps out excitedly without touching my arm, or as much as saying "thank you" or "good morning" or anything, turns back to the cab, and then that old joker comes out slowly. I hadn't noticed him inside. I hadn't expected to see anybody. It gave me a start. She says: "My father—Mr. Franklin." He was staring at me like an owl. "How do you do, sir?" says I. Both of them looked funny. It was as if something had happened to them on the way. Neither of them moved, and I stood by waiting. The captain showed himself on the poop; and I saw him at the side looking over, and then he disappeared; on the way to meet them on shore, I expected. But he just went down below again. So, not seeing him, I said: "Let me help you on board, sir." "On board!" says he in a silly fashion. "On board!" "It's not a very good ladder, but it's quite firm," says I, as he seemed to be afraid of it. And he didn't look a broken-down old man, either. You can see yourself what he is. Straight as a poker, and life enough in him yet. But he made no move, and I began to feel foolish. Then she comes forward. "Oh! Thank you, Mr. Franklin. I'll help my father up." Flabbergasted

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me—to be choked off like this. Pushed in between him and me without as much as a look my way. So of course I dropped it. What do you think? I fell back. I would have gone up on board at once and left them on the quay to come up or stay there till next week, only they were blocking the way. I couldn't very well shove them on one side. Devil only knows what was up between them. There she was, pale as death, talking to him very fast. He got as red as a turkey-cock—dash me if he didn't. A bad-tempered old bloke, I can tell you. And a bad lot, too. Never mind. I couldn't hear what she was saying to him, but she put force enough into it to shake her. It seemed—it seemed, mind!—that he didn't want to go on board. Of course it couldn't have been that. I know better. Well, she took him by the arm, above the elbow, as if to lead him, or push him rather. I was standing not quite ten feet off. Why should I have gone away? I was anxious to get back on board as soon as they would let me. I didn't want to overhear her blamed whispering either. But I couldn't stay there for ever, so I made a move to get past them if I could. And that's how I heard a few words. It was the old chap—something nasty about being "under the heel" of somebody or other. Then he says, "I don't want this sacrifice." What it meant I can't tell. It was a quarrel—of that I am certain. She looks over her shoulder, and sees me

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pretty close to them. I don't know what she found to say into his ear, but he gave way suddenly. He looked round at me too, and they went up together so quickly then that when I got on the quarter-deck I was only in time to see the inner door of the passage close after them. Queer—eh? But if it were only queerness one wouldn't mind. Some luggage in new trunks came on board in the afternoon. We undocked at midnight. And may I be hanged if I know who or what he was or is. I haven't been able to find out. No, I don't know. He may have been anything. All I know is that once, years ago when I went to see the Derby with a friend, I saw a pea-and-thimble chap who looked just like that old mystery father out of a cab.'

"All this the goggle-eyed mate had said in a resentful and melancholy voice, with pauses, to the gentle murmur of the sea. It was for him a bitter sort of pleasure to have a fresh pair of ears, a new-comer, to whom he could repeat all these matters of grief and suspicion talked over endlessly by the band of Captain Anthony's faithful subordinates. It was evidently so refreshing to his worried spirit that it made him forget the advisability of a little caution with a complete stranger. But really with Mr. Powell there was no danger. Amused, at first, at these plaints, he provoked them for fun. Afterwards, turning them over in his mind, he became impressed; and as the impression grew

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stronger with the days his resolution to keep it to himself grew stronger too.

"What made it all the easier to keep—I mean the resolution—was that Powell's sentiment of amused surprise at what struck him at first as mere absurdity was not unmingled with indignation. And his years were too few, his position too novel, his reliance on his own opinion not yet firm enough to allow him to express it with any effect. And then—what would have been the use, anyhow—and where was the necessity?

"But this thing, familiar and mysterious at the same time, occupied his imagination. The solitude of the sea intensifies the thoughts and the facts of one's experience which seems to lie at the very centre of the world, as the ship which carries one always remains the centre figure of the round horizon. He viewed the apoplectic, goggle-eyed mate and the saturnine, heavy-eyed steward as the victims of a peculiar and secret form of lunacy which poisoned their lives. But he did not give them his sympathy on that account. No. That strange affliction awakened in him a sort of suspicious wonder.

"Once—and it was at night again; for the officers of the *Ferndale* keeping watch and watch as was customary in those days, had but few occasions for intercourse—once, I say, the thick Mr. Franklin, a quaintly bulky figure under the stars, the usual witnesses of his out-

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pourings, asked him with an abruptness which was not callous, but in his simple way:

"'I believe you have no parents living?'

"Mr. Powell said that he had lost his father and mother at a very early age.

"'My mother is still alive,' declared Mr. Franklin in a tone which suggested that he was gratified by the fact. 'The old lady is lasting well. Of course she's got to be made comfortable. A woman must be looked after, and, if it comes to that, I say, give me a mother. I daresay if she had not lasted it out so well I might have gone and got married. I don't know, though. We sailors haven't got much time to look about us to any purpose. Anyhow, as the old lady was there I haven't, I may say, looked at a girl in all my life. Not that I wasn't partial to female society in my time,' he added with a pathetic intonation, while the whites of his goggle eyes gleamed amorously under the clear night sky. 'Very partial, I may say.'

"Mr. Powell was amused; and as these communications took place only when the mate was relieved of duty he had no serious objection to them. The mate's presence made the first half-hour and sometimes even more of his watch on deck pass away. If his senior did not mind losing some of his rest it was not Mr. Powell's affair. Franklin was a decent fellow. His intention was not to boast of his filial piety.

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"'Of course I mean respectable female society,' he explained. 'The other sort is neither here nor there. I blame no man's conduct, but a well-brought-up young fellow like you knows that there's precious little fun to be got out of it.' He fetched a deep sigh. 'I wish Captain Anthony's mother had been a lasting sort like my old lady. He would have had to look after her and he would have done it well. Captain Anthony is a proper man. And it would have saved him from the most foolish——'

"He did not finish the phrase which certainly was turning bitter in his mouth. Mr. Powell thought to himself: 'There he goes again.' He laughed a little.

"'I don't understand why you are so hard on the Captain, Mr. Franklin. I thought you were a great friend of his.'

"Mr. Franklin exclaimed at this. He was not hard on the Captain. Nothing was further from his thoughts. Friend! Of course he was a good friend and a faithful servant. He begged Powell to understand that if Captain Anthony chose to strike a bargain with Old Nick to-morrow, and Old Nick were good to the Captain, he (Franklin) would find it in his heart to love Old Nick for the Captain's sake. That was so. On the other hand, if a saint, an angel with white wings came along and——"

"He broke off short again as if his own vehemence

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had frightened him. Then in his strained pathetic voice (which he had never raised) he observed that it was no use talking. Anybody could see that the man was changed.

"'As to that,' said young Powell, 'it is impossible for me to judge.'

"'Good Lord!' whispered the mate. 'An educated, clever young fellow like you with a pair of eyes on him and some sense too! Is that how a happy man looks? Eh? Young you may be, but you aren't a kid; and I dare you to say "Yes!"'

"Mr. Powell did not take up the challenge. He did not know what to think of the mate's view. Still, it seemed as if it had opened his understanding in a measure. He conceded that the Captain did not look very well.

"'Not very well,' repeated the mate mournfully. 'Do you think a man with a face like that can hope to live his life out? You haven't knocked about long in this world yet, but you are a sailor, you have been in three or four ships, you say. Well, have you ever seen a shipmaster walking his own deck as if he did not know what he had underfoot? Have you? Dam'me if I don't think that he forgets where he is. Of course he can be no other than a prime seaman; but it's lucky, all the same, he has me on board. I know by this time what he wants done without being told. Do you know

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that I have had no order given me since we left port? Do you know that he has never once opened his lips to me unless I spoke to him first? I? His chief officer; his shipmate for full six years, with whom he had no cross word—not once in all that time. Aye. Not a cross look even. True that when I do make him speak to me, there is his dear old self, the quick eye, the kind voice. Could hardly be other to his old Franklin. But what's the good? Eyes, voice, everything's miles away. And for all that I take good care never to address him when the poop isn't clear. Yes! Only we two and nothing but the sea with us. You think it would be all right; the only chief mate he ever had—Mr. Franklin here and Mr. Franklin there—when anything went wrong the first word you would hear about the decks was "Franklin!"—I am thirteen years older than he is—you would think it would be all right, wouldn't you? Only we two on this poop on which we saw each other first—he a young master—told me that he thought I would suit him very well—we two, and thirty-one days out at sea, and it's no good! It's like talking to a man standing on shore. I can't get him back. I can't get at him. I feel sometimes as if I must shake him by the arm: "Wake up! Wake up! You are wanted, sir . . .!"'

"Young Powell recognised the expression of a true sentiment, a thing so rare in this world where there are

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so many mutes and so many excellent reasons even at sea for an articulate man not to give himself away, that he felt something like respect for this outburst. It was not loud. The grotesque squat shape, with the knob of the head as if rammed down between the square shoulders by a blow from a club, moved vaguely in a circumscribed space limited by the two harness-casks lashed to the front rail of the poop, without gestures, hands in the pockets of the jacket, elbows pressed closely to its side; and the voice without resonance, passed from anger to dismay and back again without a single louder word in the hurried delivery, interrupted only by slight gasps for air as if the speaker were being choked by the suppressed passion of his grief.

"Mr. Powell, though moved to a certain extent, was by no means carried away. And just as he thought that it was all over, the other, fidgeting in the darkness, was heard again explosive, bewildered but not very loud in the silence of the ship and the great empty peace of the sea.

"'They have done something to him! What is it? What can it be? Can't you guess? Don't you know?'

"'Good heavens!' Young Powell was astounded on discovering that this was an appeal addressed to him. 'How on earth can I know?'

"'You do talk to that white-faced, black-eyed . . . I've seen you talking to her more than a dozen times.'

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"Young Powell, his sympathy suddenly chilled, remarked in a disdainful tone that Mrs. Anthony's eyes were not black.

"'I wish to God she had never set them on the Captain, whatever colour they are,' retorted Franklin. 'She and that old chap with the scraped jaws who sits over her and stares down at her dead-white face with his yellow eyes—confound them! Perhaps you will tell us that his eyes are not yellow?'

"Powell, not interested in the colour of Mr. Smith's eyes, made a vague gesture. Yellow or not yellow, it was all one to him.

"The mate murmured to himself. 'No. He can't know. No! No more than a baby. It would take an older head.'

"'I don't even understand what you mean,' observed Mr. Powell coldly.

"'And even the best head would be puzzled by such devil-work,' the mate continued, muttering. 'Well, I have heard tell of women doing for a man in one way or another when they got him fairly ashore. But to bring their devilry to sea and fasten on such a man! . . . It's something I can't understand. But I can watch. Let them look out—I say!'

"His short figure, unable to stoop, without flexibility, could not express dejection. He was very tired suddenly; he dragged his feet going off the poop. Before he left

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it with nearly an hour of his watch below sacrificed, he addressed himself once more to our young man who stood abreast of the mizzen rigging in an unreceptive mood expressed by silence and immobility. He did not regret, he said, having spoken openly on this very serious matter.

"'I don't know about its seriousness, sir,' was Mr. Powell's frank answer. 'But if you think you have been telling me something very new you are mistaken. You can't keep that matter out of your speeches. It's the sort of thing I've been hearing more or less ever since I came on board.'

"Mr. Powell, speaking truthfully, did not mean to speak offensively. He had instincts of wisdom; he felt that this was a serious affair, for it had nothing to do with reason. He did not want to raise an enemy for himself in the mate. And Mr. Franklin did not take offence. To Mr. Powell's truthful statement he answered with equal truth and simplicity that it was very likely, very likely. With a thing like that (next door to witchcraft almost) weighing on his mind, the wonder was that he could think of anything else. The poor man must have found in the restlessness of his thoughts the illusion of being engaged in an active contest with some power of evil; for his last words as he went lingeringly down the poop ladder expressed the quaint hope that he would get him, Powell, 'on our side yet.'

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"Mr. Powell—just imagine a straightforward youngster assailed in this fashion on the high seas—answered merely by an embarrassed and uneasy laugh which reflected exactly the state of his innocent soul. The apoplectic mate, already half-way down, went up again three steps of the poop ladder. Why, yes. A proper young fellow, the mate expected, wouldn't stand by and see a man, a good sailor and his own skipper, in trouble without taking his part against a couple of shore people who—— Mr. Powell interrupted him impatiently, asking what was the trouble?

"'What is it you are hinting at?' he cried with an inexplicable irritation.

"'I don't like to think of him all alone down there with these two,' Franklin whispered impressively. 'Upon my word I don't. God only knows what may be going on there. . . . Don't laugh. . . . It was bad enough last voyage when Mrs. Brown had a cabin aft; but now it's worse. It frightens me. I can't sleep sometimes for thinking of him all alone there, shut off from us all.'

"Mrs. Brown was the steward's wife. You must understand that shortly after his visit to the Fyne cottage (with all its consequences), Anthony had got an offer to go to the Western Islands, and bring home the cargo of some ship which, damaged in a collision or a stranding, took refuge in St. Michael, and was condemned there. Roderick Anthony had connections

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which would put such paying jobs in his way. So Flora de Barral had but a five months' voyage, a mere excursion, for her first trial of sea-life. And Anthony, clearly trying to be most attentive, had induced this Mrs. Brown, the wife of his faithful steward, to come along as maid to his bride. But for some reason or other this arrangement was not continued. And the mate, tormented by indefinite alarms and forebodings, regretted it. He regretted that Jane Brown was no longer on board—as a sort of representative of Captain Anthony's faithful servants, to watch quietly what went on in that part of the ship this fatal marriage had closed to their vigilance. That had been excellent. For she was a dependable woman.

"Powell did not detect any particular excellence in what seemed a spying employment. But in his simplicity he said that he should have thought Mrs. Anthony would have been glad anyhow to have another woman on board. He was thinking of the white-faced girlish personality which it seemed to him ought to have been cared for. The innocent young man always looked upon the girl as immature; something of a child yet.

"'She! glad! Why it was she who had her fired out. She didn't want anybody around the cabin. Mrs. Brown is certain of it. She told her husband so. You ask the steward and hear what he has to say about it. That's why I don't like it. A capable woman who knew

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her place. But no. Out she must go. For no fault mind you. The Captain was ashamed to send her away. But that wife of his—aye the precious pair of them have got hold of him. I can't speak to him for a minute on the poop without that thimble-rigging coon coming gliding up. I'll tell you what. I overheard once—God knows I didn't try to—only he forgot I was on the other side of the skylight with my sextant—I overheard him—you know how he sits hanging over her chair and talking away without properly opening his mouth—yes I caught the word right enough. He was alluding to the Captain as "the jailer." The jail . . .!'

"Franklin broke off with a profane execration. A silence reigned for a long time and the slight, very gentle rolling of the ship slipping before the N.E. trade-wind seemed to be a soothing device for lulling to sleep the suspicions of men who trust themselves to the sea.

"A deep sigh was heard followed by the mate's voice asking dismally if that was the way one would speak of a man to whom one wished well? No better proof of something wrong was needed. Therefore he hoped, as he vanished at last, that Mr. Powell would be on their side. And this time Mr. Powell did not answer this hope with an embarrassed laugh.

"That young officer was more and more surprised at the nature of the incongruous revelations coming to

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him in the surroundings and in the atmosphere of the open sea. It is difficult for us to understand the extent, the completeness, the comprehensiveness of his inexperience, for us who didn't go to sea out of a small private school at the age of fourteen years and nine months. Leaning on his elbow in the mizzen rigging and so still that the helmsman over there at the other end of the poop might have (and he probably did) suspect him of being criminally asleep on duty, he tried to 'get hold of that thing' by some side which would fit in with his simple notions of psychology. 'What the deuce are they worrying about?' he asked himself in a dazed and contemptuous impatience. But all the same 'jailer' was a funny name to give a man; unkind, unfriendly, nasty. He was sorry that Mr. Smith was guilty in that matter because, the truth must be told, he had been to a certain extent sensible of having been noticed in a quiet manner by the father of Mrs. Anthony. Youth appreciates that sort of recognition which is the subtlest form of flattery age can offer. Mr. Smith seized opportunities to approach him on deck. His remarks were sometimes weird and enigmatical. He was doubtless an eccentric old gent. But from that to calling his son-in-law (whom he never approached on deck) nasty names behind his back was a long step.

"And Mr. Powell marvelled. . . .

"While he was telling me all this,"—Marlow changed

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his tone—"I marvelled even more. It was as if misfortune marked its victims on the forehead for the dislike of the crowd. I am not thinking here of numbers. Two men may behave like a crowd, three certainly will when their emotions are engaged. It was as if the forehead of Flora de Barral were marked. Was the girl born to be a victim; to be always disliked and crushed as if she were too fine for this world? Or too luckless —since that also is often counted as sin.

"Yes, I marvelled more since I knew more of the girl than Mr. Powell—if only her true name; and more of Captain Anthony—if only the fact that he was the son of a delicate erotic poet of a markedly refined and autocratic temperament. Yes I knew their joint stories which Mr. Powell did not know. The chapter in it he was opening to me, the sea-chapter, with such new personages as the sentimental and apoplectic chief-mate and the morose steward, however astounding to him in its detached condition was much more so to me as a member of a series, following the chapter outside the Eastern Hotel in which I myself had played my part. In view of her declarations and my sage remarks it was very unexpected. She had meant well, and I had certainly meant well too. Captain Anthony—as far as I could gather from little Fyne—had meant well. As far as such lofty words may be applied to the obscure personages of this story we were all filled with the

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noblest sentiments and intentions. The sea was there to give them the shelter of its solitude free from the earth's petty suggestions. I could well marvel in myself, as to what had happened.

"I hope that if he saw it, Mr. Powell forgave me the smile of which I was guilty at that moment. The light in the cabin of his little cutter was dim. And the smile was dim too. Dim and fleeting. The girl's life had presented itself to me as a tragi-comical adventure, the saddest thing on earth, slipping between frank laughter and unabashed tears. Yes, the saddest facts and the most common, and, being common, perhaps the most worthy of our unreserved pity.

"The purely human reality is capable of lyrism but not of abstraction. Nothing will serve for its understanding but the evidence of rational linking up of characters and facts. And beginning with Flora de Barral, in the light of my memories I was certain that she at least must have been passive; for that is of necessity the part of women, this waiting on fate which some of them, and not the most intelligent, cover up by the vain appearances of agitation. Flora de Barral was not exceptionally intelligent but she was thoroughly feminine. She would be passive (and that does not mean inanimate) in the circumstances, where the mere fact of being a woman was enough to give her an occult and supreme significance. And she would be enduring which

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is the essence of woman's visible, tangible power. Of that I was certain. Had she not endured already? Yet it is so true that the germ of destruction lies in wait for us mortals, even at the very source of our strength, that one may die of too much endurance as well as of too little of it.

"Such was my train of thought. And I was mindful also of my first view of her—toying or perhaps communing in earnest with the possibilities of a precipice. But I did not ask Mr. Powell anxiously what had happened to Mrs. Anthony in the end. I let him go on in his own way feeling that no matter what strange facts he would have to disclose, I was certain to know much more of them than he ever did know or could possibly guess. . . ."

Marlow paused for quite a long time. He seemed uncertain as though he had advanced something beyond my grasp. Purposely I made no sign. "You understand?" he asked.

"Perfectly," I said. "You are the expert in the psychological wilderness. This is like one of those Redskin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always liked such stories. Go on."

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Marlow smiled indulgently at my jesting. "It is not exactly a story for boys," he said. "I go on then. The sign, as you call it, was not very plentiful but very much to the purpose and when Mr. Powell heard (at a certain moment I felt bound to tell him) when he heard that I had known Mrs. Anthony before her marriage, that, to a certain extent, I was her confidant . . . For you can't deny that to a certain extent . . . Well let us say that I had a look in. . . . A young girl, you know, is something like a temple. You pass by and wonder what mysterious rites are going on in there, what prayers, what visions? The privileged men, the lover, the husband, who are given the key of the sanctuary do not always know how to use it. For myself, without claim, without merit, simply by chance I had been allowed to look through the half-opened door and I had seen the saddest possible desecration, the withered brightness of youth, a spirit neither made cringing nor yet dulled but as if bewildered in quivering hopelessness by gratuitous cruelty; self-confidence destroyed and, instead, a resigned recklessness, a mournful callousness (and all this simple, almost naive)—before the material and moral difficulties of the situation. The passive anguish of the luckless!

"I asked myself: wasn't that ill-luck exhausted yet? Ill-luck which is like the hate of invisible powers interpreted, made sensible and injurious by the actions of men?

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"Mr. Powell as you may well imagine had opened his eyes at my statement. But he was full of his recalled experiences on board the *Ferndale,* and the strangeness of being mixed up in what went on aboard, simply because his name was also the name of a shipping-master, kept him in a state of wonder which made other coincidences, however unlikely, not so very surprising after all.

"This astonishing occurrence was so present to his mind that he always felt as though he were there under false pretences. And this feeling was so uncomfortable that it nerved him to break through the awe-inspiring aloofness of his Captain. He wanted to make a clean breast of it. I imagine that his youth stood in good stead to Mr. Powell. Oh, yes. Youth is a power. Even Captain Anthony had to take some notice of it, as if it refreshed him to see something untouched, unscarred, unhardened by suffering. Or perhaps the very novelty of that face, on board a ship where he had seen the same faces for years, attracted his attention.

"Whether one day he dropped a word to his new second officer or only looked at him I don't know; but Mr. Powell seized the opportunity whatever it was. The Captain who had started and stopped in his everlasting rapid walk smoothed his brow very soon, heard him to the end and then laughed a little.

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"'Ah! That's the story. And you felt you must put me right as to this.'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'It doesn't matter how you came on board,' said Anthony. And then showing that perhaps he was not so utterly absent from his ship as Franklin supposed: 'That's all right. You seem to be getting on very well with everybody,' he said in his curt hurried tone, as if talking hurt him, and his eyes already straying over the sea as usual.

"'Yes, sir.'

"Powell tells me that looking then at the strong face to which that haggard expression was returning, he had the impulse, from some confused friendly feeling, to add: 'I am very happy on board here, sir.'

"The quickly returning glance, its steadiness, abashed Mr. Powell and made him even step back a little. The Captain looked as though he had forgotten the meaning of the word.

"'You—what? Oh yes . . . You . . . of course . . . Happy. Why not?'

"This was merely muttered; and next moment Anthony was off on his headlong tramp, his eyes turned to the sea away from his ship.

"A sailor indeed looks generally into the great distances, but in Captain Anthony's case there was—as Powell expressed it—something particular, something

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purposeful like the avoidance of pain or temptation. It was very marked once one had become aware of it. Before, one felt only a pronounced strangeness. Not that the Captain—Powell was careful to explain—didn't see things as a shipmaster should. The proof of it was that on that very occasion he desired him suddenly after a period of silent pacing, to have all the staysails sheets eased off, and he was going on with some other remarks on the subject of these staysails when Mrs. Anthony followed by her father emerged from the companion. She established herself in her chair to leeward of the skylight as usual. Thereupon the Captain cut short whatever he was going to say, and in a little while went down below.

"I asked Mr. Powell whether the Captain and his wife never conversed on deck. He said no—or at any rate they never exchanged more than a couple of words. There was some constraint between them. For instance, on that very occasion, when Mrs. Anthony came out they did look at each other; the Captain's eyes indeed followed her till she sat down; but he did not speak to her; he did not approach her; and afterwards left the deck without turning his head her way after this first silent exchange of glances.

"I asked Mr. Powell what did he do then, the Captain being out of the way. 'I went over and talked to Mrs. Anthony. I was thinking that it must

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be very dull for her. She seemed to be such a stranger to the ship.'

"'The father was there of course?'

"'Always,' said Powell. 'He was always there sitting on the skylight, as if he were keeping watch over her. And I think,' he added, 'that he was worrying her. Not that she showed it in any way. Mrs. Anthony was always very quiet and always ready to look one straight in the face.'

"'You talked together a lot?' I pursued my enquiries.

"'She mostly let me talk to her,' confessed Mr. Powell. 'I don't know that she was very much interested—but still she let me. She never cut me short.'

"All the sympathies of Mr. Powell were for Flora Anthony née de Barral. She was the only human being younger than himself on board that ship since the *Ferndale* carried no boys and was manned by a full crew of able seamen. Yes! their youth had created a sort of bond between them. Mr. Powell's open countenance must have appeared to her distinctly pleasing amongst the mature, rough, crabbed or even inimical faces she saw around her. With the warm generosity of his age young Powell was on her side, as it were, even before he knew that there were sides to be taken on board that ship, and what this taking sides was about. There was a girl. A nice girl. He asked himself no questions. Flora de Barral was not so much younger in years than

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himself; but for some reason, perhaps by contrast with the accepted idea of a Captain's wife, he could not regard her otherwise but as an extremely youthful creature. At the same time, apart from her exalted position, she exercised over him the supremacy a woman's earlier maturity gives her over a young man of her own age. As a matter of fact we can see that, without ever having more than a half an hour's consecutive conversation together, and the distances duly preserved, these two were becoming friends—under the eye of the old man, I suppose.

"How he first got in touch with his Captain's wife Powell relates in this way. It was long before his memorable conversation with the mate and shortly after getting clear of the channel. It was gloomy weather; dead head wind, blowing quite half a gale; the *Ferndale* under reduced sail, was stretching close-hauled across the track of the homeward bound ships, just moving through the water and no more, since there was no object in pressing her and the weather looked threatening. About ten o'clock at night he was alone on the poop, in charge, keeping well aft by the weather rail and staring to windward, when amongst the white, breaking seas, under the black sky, he made out the lights of a ship. He watched them for some time. She was running dead before the wind of course. She will pass jolly close—he said to himself; and then suddenly he felt a great mistrust of

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that approaching ship. She's heading straight for us —he thought. It was not his business to get out of the way. On the contrary. And his uneasiness grew by the recollection of the forty tons of dynamite in the body of the *Ferndale;* not the sort of cargo one thinks of with equanimity in connection with a threatened collision. He gazed at the two small lights in the dark immensity filled with the angry noise of the seas. They fascinated him till their plainness to his sight gave him a conviction that there was danger there. He knew in his mind what to do in the emergency, but very properly he felt that he must call the Captain out at once.

"He crossed the deck in one stride. By the immemorial custom and usage of the sea the Captain's room is on the starboard side. You would just as soon expect your captain to have his nose at the back of his head as to have his state-room on the port side of the ship. Powell forgot all about the direction on that point given him by the chief. He flew over as I said, stamped with his foot and then putting his face to the cowl of the big ventilator shouted down there: 'Please come on deck, sir,' in a voice which was not trembling or scared but which we may call fairly expressive. There could not be a mistake as to the urgency of the call. But instead of the expected alert 'All right!' and the sound of a rush down there, he heard only a faint exclamation— then silence.

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"Think of his astonishment! He remained there, his ear in the cowl of the ventilator, his eyes fastened on those menacing sidelights dancing on the gusts of wind which swept the angry darkness of the sea. It was as though he had waited an hour but it was something much less than a minute before he fairly bellowed into the wide tube 'Captain Anthony.' An agitated 'What is this?' was what he heard down there in Mrs. Anthony's voice, light rapid footsteps. . . . Why didn't she try to wake him up! 'I want the Captain,' he shouted, then gave it up, making a dash at the companion where a blue light was kept, resolved to act for himself.

"On the way he glanced at the helmsman whose face lighted up by the binnacle lamps was calm. He said rapidly to him: 'Stand by to spin that helm up at the first word.' The answer 'Aye, aye, sir,' was delivered in a steady voice. Then Mr. Powell after a shout for the watch on deck to come aft, ran to the ship's side and struck the blue light on the rail.

"A sort of nasty little spitting of sparks was all he got. The light (perhaps affected by damp) had failed to ignite. The time of all these various acts must be counted in seconds. Powell confessed to me that at this failure he experienced a paralysis of thought, of voice, of limbs. The unexpectedness of this misfire positively overcame his faculties. It was the only thing for which

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his imagination was not prepared. It was knocked clean over. When it got up it was with the suggestion that he must do something at once or there would be a broadside smash accompanied by the explosion of dynamite, in which both ships would be blown up and every soul on board of them would vanish off the earth in an enormous flame and uproar.

"He saw the catastrophe happening and at the same moment, before he could open his mouth or stir a limb to ward off the vision a voice very near his ear, the measured voice of Captain Anthony said: 'Wouldn't light — eh? Throw it down! Jump for the flare-up.'

"The spring of activity in Mr. Powell was released with great force. He jumped. The flare-up was kept inside the companion with a box of matches ready to hand. Almost before he knew he had moved he was diving under the companion slide. He got hold of the can in the dark and tried to strike a light. But he had to press the flare-holder to his breast with one arm, his fingers were damp and stiff, his hands trembled a little. One match broke. Another went out. In its flame he saw the colourless face of Mrs. Anthony a little below him, standing on the cabin stairs. Her eyes which were very close to his (he was in a crouching posture on the top step) seemed to burn darkly in the vanishing light. On deck the Captain's voice was heard

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sudden and unexpectedly sardonic: 'You had better look sharp, if you want to be in time.'

"'Let me have the box,' said Mrs. Anthony in a hurried and familiar whisper which sounded amused as if they had been a couple of children up to some lark behind a wall. He was glad of the offer which seemed to him very natural, and without ceremony.

"'Here you are. Catch hold.'

Their hands touched in the dark and she took the box while he held the paraffin soaked torch in its iron holder. He thought of warning her: 'Look out for yourself.' But before he had the time to finish the sentence the flare blazed up violently between them and he saw her throw herself back with an arm across her face. 'Hallo,' he exclaimed; only he could not stop a moment to ask if she was hurt. He bolted out of the companion straight into his Captain who took the flare from him and held it high above his head.

"The fierce flame fluttered like a silk flag, throwing an angry swaying glare mingled with moving shadows over the poop, lighting up the concave surfaces of the sails, gleaming on the wet paint of the white rails. And young Powell turned his eyes to windward with a catch in his breath.

"The strange ship, a darker shape in the night, did not seem to be moving onwards but only to grow more distinct right abeam, staring at the *Ferndale* with one

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green and one red eye which swayed and tossed as if they belonged to the restless head of some invisible monster ambushed in the night amongst the waves. A moment, long like eternity, elapsed, and, suddenly, the monster which seemed to take to itself the shape of a mountain shut its green eye without as much as a preparatory wink.

"Mr. Powell drew a free breath. 'All right now,' said Captain Anthony in a quiet undertone. He gave the blazing flare to Powell and walked aft to watch the passing of that menace of destruction coming blindly with its parti-coloured stare out of a blind night on the wings of a sweeping wind. Her very form could be distinguished now black and elongated amongst the hissing patches of foam bursting along her path.

"As is always the case with a ship running before wind and sea she did not seem to an onlooker to move very fast; but to be progressing indolently in long leisurely bounds and pauses in the midst of the overtaking waves. It was only when actually passing the stern within easy hail of the *Ferndale* that her headlong speed became apparent to the eye. With the red light shut off and soaring like an immense shadow on the crest of a wave she was lost to view in one great, forward swing, melting into the lightless space.

"'Close shave,' said Captain Anthony in an indifferent voice just raised enough to be heard in the

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wind. 'A blind lot on board that ship. Put out the flare now.'

"Silently Mr. Powell inverted the holder, smothering the flame in the can, bringing about by the mere turn of his wrist the fall of darkness upon the poop. And at the same time vanished out of his mind's eye the vision of another flame enormous and fierce shooting violently from a white churned patch of the sea, lighting up the very clouds and carrying upwards in its volcanic rush flying spars, corpses, the fragments of two destroyed ships. It vanished and there was an immense relief. He told me he did not know how scared he had been, not generally but of that very thing his imagination had conjured, till it was all over. He measured it (for fear is a great tension) by the feeling of slack weariness which came over him all at once.

"He walked to the companion and stooping low to put the flare in its usual place saw in the darkness the motionless pale oval of Mrs. Anthony's face. She whispered quietly:

"'Is anything going to happen? What is it?'

"'It's all over now,' he whispered back.

"He remained bent low, his head inside the cover staring at that white ghostly oval. He wondered she had not rushed out on deck. She had remained quietly there. This was pluck. Wonderful self-restraint. And it was not stupidity on her part. She knew there was

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imminent danger and probably had some notion of its nature.

"'You stayed here waiting for what would come,' he murmured admiringly.

"'Wasn't that the best thing to do?' she asked.

"He didn't know. Perhaps. He confessed he could not have done it. Not he. His flesh and blood could not have stood it. He would have felt he must see what was coming. Then he remembered that the flare might have scorched her face, and expressed his concern.

"'A bit. Nothing to hurt. Smell the singed hair?'

"There was a sort of gaiety in her tone. She might have been frightened but she certainly was not overcome and suffered from no reaction. This confirmed and augmented if possible Mr. Powell's good opinion of her as a 'jolly girl,' though it seemed to him positively monstrous to refer in such terms to one's Captain's wife. 'But she doesn't look it,' he thought in extenuation and was going to say something more to her about the lighting of that flare when another voice was heard in the companion, saying some indistinct words. Its tone was contemptuous; it came from below, from the bottom of the stairs. It was a voice in the cabin. And the only other voice which could be heard in the main cabin at this time of the evening was the voice of Mrs. Anthony's father. The indistinct white oval sank from Mr. Powell's sight so swiftly as to take him by surprise. For a mo-

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ment he hung at the opening of the companion and now that her slight form was no longer obstructing the narrow and winding staircase the voices came up louder but the words were still indistinct. The old gentleman was excited about something and Mrs. Anthony was 'managing him' as Powell expressed it. They moved away from the bottom of the stairs and Powell went away from the companion. Yet he fancied he had heard the words 'Lost to me' before he withdrew his head. They had been uttered by Mr. Smith.

"Captain Anthony had not moved away from the taffrail. He remained in the very position he took up to watch the other ship go by rolling and swinging all shadowy in the uproar of the following seas. He stirred not; and Powell keeping near by did not dare speak to him, so enigmatical in its contemplation of the night did his figure appear to his young eyes: indistinct—and in its immobility staring into gloom, the prey of some incomprehensible grief, longing or regret.

"Why is it that the stillness of a human being is often so impressive, so suggestive of evil—as if our proper fate were a ceaseless agitation? The stillness of Captain Anthony became almost intolerable to his second officer. Mr. Powell loitering about the skylight wanted his Captain off the deck now. 'Why doesn't he go below?' he asked himself impatiently. He ventured a cough.

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"Whether the effect of the cough or not Captain Anthony spoke. He did not move the least bit. With his back remaining turned to the whole length of the ship he asked Mr. Powell with some brusqueness if the chief mate had neglected to instruct him that the Captain was to be found on the port side.

"'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Powell approaching his back. 'The mate told me to stamp on the port side when I wanted you; but I didn't remember at the moment.'

"'You should remember,' the Captain uttered with an effort. Then added mumbling 'I don't want Mrs. Anthony frightened. Don't you see?'

"'She wasn't this time,' Powell said innocently: 'She lighted the flare-up for me, sir.'

"'This time,' Captain Anthony exclaimed and turned round. 'Mrs. Anthony lighted the flare? Mrs. Anthony! . . .' Powell explained that she was in the companion all the time.

"'All the time,' repeated the Captain. It seemed queer to Powell that instead of going himself to see the Captain should ask him:

"'Is she there now?'

"Powell said that she had gone below after the ship had passed clear of the *Ferndale*. Captain Anthony made a movement towards the companion himself, when Powell added the information. 'Mr. Smith called to

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Mrs. Anthony from the saloon, sir. I believe they are talking there now.'

"He was surprised to see the Captain give up the idea of going below after all.

"He began to walk the poop instead regardless of the cold, of the damp wind and of the sprays. And yet he had nothing on but his sleeping suit and slippers. Powell placing himself on the break of the poop kept a look-out. When after some time he turned his head to steal a glance at his eccentric Captain he could not see his active and shadowy figure swinging to and fro. The second mate of the *Ferndale* walked aft peering about and addressed the seaman who steered.

"'Captain gone below?'

"'Yes, sir,' said the fellow who with a quid of tobacco bulging out his left cheek kept his eyes on the compass card. 'This minute. He laughed.'

"'Laughed,' repeated Powell incredulously. 'Do you mean the Captain did? You must be mistaken. What would he want to laugh for?'

"'Don't know, sir.'

"The elderly sailor displayed a profound indifference towards human emotions. However after a longish pause he conceded a few words more to the second officer's weakness. 'Yes. He was walking the deck as usual when suddenly he laughed a little and made

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for the companion. Thought of something funny all at once.'

"Something funny! That Mr. Powell could not believe. He did not ask himself why at the time. Funny thoughts come to men, though, in all sorts of situations; they come to all sorts of men. Nevertheless Mr. Powell was shocked to learn that Captain Anthony had laughed without visible cause on a certain night. The impression for some reason was disagreeable. And it was then, while finishing his watch, with the chilly gusts of wind sweeping at him out of the darkness where the short sea of the soundings growled spitefully all round the ship, that it occurred to his unsophisticated mind that perhaps things are not what they are confidently expected to be; that it was possible that Captain Anthony was not a happy man. . . . In so far you will perceive he was to a certain extent prepared for the apoplectic and sensitive Franklin's lamentations about his Captain. And though he treated them with a contempt which was in a great measure sincere, yet he admitted to me that deep down within him an inexplicable and uneasy suspicion that all was not well in that cabin, so unusually cut off from the rest of the ship came into being and grew against his will. . . ."

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CHAPTER IV.

ANTHONY AND FLORA.

MARLOW emerged out of the shadow of the book-case to get himself a cigar from a box which stood on a little table by my side. In the full light of the room I saw in his eyes that slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth.

He selected and lit the cigar with affected care, then turned upon me. I had been looking at him silently.

"I suppose," he said, the mockery of his eyes giving a pellucid flavour to his tone, "that you think it's high time I told you something definite. I mean something about that psychological cabin mystery of discomfort (for it's obvious that it must be psychological) which affected so profoundly Mr. Franklin the chief mate, and had even disturbed the serene innocence of Mr. Powell, the second of the ship *Ferndale,* commanded by Roderick Anthony—the son of the poet, you know."

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"You are going to confess now that you have failed to find it out," I said in pretended indignation.

"It would serve you right if I told you that I have. But I won't. I haven't failed. I own though that for a time, I was puzzled. However, I have now seen our Powell many times under the most favourable conditions —and besides I came upon a most unexpected source of information. . . . But never mind that. The means don't concern you except in so far as they belong to the story. I'll admit that for some time the old-maiden-lady-like occupation of putting two and two together failed to procure a coherent theory. I am speaking now as an investigator—a man of deductions. With what we know of Roderick Anthony and Flora de Barral I could not deduct an ordinary marital quarrel beautifully matured in less than a year—could I. If you ask me what is an ordinary marital quarrel I will tell you, that it is a difference about nothing; I mean, these no-things which, as Mr. Powell told us when we first met him, shore people are so prone to start a row about, and nurse into hatred from an idle sense of wrong, from perverted ambition, for spectacular reasons too. There are on earth no actors too humble and obscure not to have a gallery; that gallery which envenoms the play by stealthy jeers, counsels of anger, amused comments or words of perfidious compassion. However, the Anthonys were free from all demoralising influences.

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At sea, you know, there is no gallery. You hear no tormenting echoes of your own littleness there, where either a great elemental voice roars defiantly under the sky or else an elemental silence seems to be part of the infinite stillness of the universe.

"Remembering Flora de Barral in the depths of moral misery, and Roderick Anthony carried away by a gust of tempestuous tenderness, I asked myself, Is it all forgotten already? What could they have found to estrange them from each other with this rapidity and this thoroughness so far from all temptations, in the peace of the sea and in an isolation so complete that if it had not been the jealous devotion of the preposterous Franklin stimulating the attention of Powell, there would have been no record, no evidence of it at all.

"I must confess at once that it was Flora de Barral whom I suspected. In this world as at present organised women are the suspected half of the population. There are good reasons for that. These reasons are so discoverable with a little reflection that it is not worth my while to set them out for you. I will only mention this: that the part falling to women's share being all 'influence' has an air of occult and mysterious action, something not altogether trustworthy like all natural forces which, for us, work in the dark because of our imperfect comprehension.

"If women were not a force of nature, blind in its

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strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted. As it is one can't help it. You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony . . . Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him—very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder. . . ."

"A far-fetched enough parallel," I observed coldly to Marlow. He had returned to the armchair in the shadow of the bookcase. "But accepting the meaning you have in your mind it reduces itself to the knowledge of how to use it. And if you mean that this ravenous Anthony——"

"Ravenous is good," interrupted Marlow. "He was a-hungering and a-thirsting for femininity to enter his life in a way no mere feminist could have the slightest conception of. I reckon that this accounts for much of Fyne's disgust with him. Good little Fyne. You have no idea what infernal mischief he had worked during his call at the hotel. But then who could have suspected Anthony of being a heroic creature. There are

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several kinds of heroism and one of them at least is idiotic. It is the one which wears the aspect of sublime delicacy. It is apparently the one of which the son of the delicate poet was capable.

"He certainly resembled his father, who, by the way, wore out two women without any satisfaction to himself, because they did not come up to his supra-refined standard of the delicacy which is so perceptible in his verses. That's your poet. He demands too much from others. The inarticulate son had set up a standard for himself with that need for embodying in his conduct the dreams, the passion, the impulses the poet puts into arrangements of verses, which are dearer to him than his own self—and may make his own self appear sublime in the eyes of other people, and even in his own eyes.

"Did Anthony wish to appear sublime in his own eyes? I should not like to make that charge; though indeed there are other, less noble, ambitions at which the world does not dare to smile. But I don't think so; I do not even think that there was in what he did a conscious and lofty confidence in himself, a particularly pronounced sense of power which leads men so often into impossible or equivocal situations. Looked at abstractedly (the way in which truth is often seen in its real shape) his life had been a life of solitude and silence—and desire.

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"Chance had thrown that girl in his way; and if we may smile at his violent conquest of Flora de Barral we must admit also that this eager appropriation was truly the act of a man of solitude and desire; a man also, who, unless a complete imbecile, must have been a man of long and ardent reveries wherein the faculty of sincere passion matures slowly in the unexplored recesses of the heart. And I know also that a passion, dominating or tyrannical, invading the whole man and subjugating all his faculties to its own unique end, may conduct him whom it spurs and drives, into all sorts of adventures, to the brink of unfathomable dangers, to the limits of folly, and madness, and death.

"To the man then of a silence made only more impressive by the inarticulate thunders and mutters of the great seas, an utter stranger to the clatter of tongues, there comes the muscular little Fyne, the most marked representative of that mankind whose voice is so strange to him, the husband of his sister, a personality standing out from the misty and remote multitude. He comes and throws at him more talk than he had ever heard boomed out in an hour, and certainly touching the deepest things Anthony had ever discovered in himself, and flings words like 'unfair' whose very sound is abhorrent to him. Unfair! Undue advantage! He! Unfair to that girl? Cruel to her!

"No scorn could stand against the impression of

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such charges advanced with heat and conviction. They shook him. They were yet vibrating in the air of that stuffy hotel-room, terrific, disturbing, impossible to get rid of, when the door opened and Flora de Barral entered.

"He did not even notice that she was late. He was sitting on a sofa plunged in gloom. Was it true? Having himself always said exactly what he meant he imagined that people (unless they were liars, which of course his brother-in-law could not be) never said more than they meant. The deep chest voice of little Fyne was still in his ear. 'He knows,' Anthony said to himself. He thought he had better go away and never see her again. But she stood there before him accusing and appealing. How could he abandon her? That was out of the question. She had no one. Or rather she had someone. That father. Anthony was willing to take him at her valuation. This father may have been the victim of the most atrocious injustice. But what could a man coming out of jail do? An old man too. And then—what sort of man? What would become of them both? Anthony shuddered slightly and the faint smile with which Flora had entered the room faded on her lips. She was used to his impetuous tenderness. She was no longer afraid of it. But she had never seen him look like this before, and she suspected at once some new cruelty of life. He got up

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with his usual ardour but as if sobered by a momentous resolve and said:

"'No. I can't let you out of my sight. I have seen you. You have told me your story. You are honest. You have never told me you loved me.'

"She waited, saying to herself that he had never given her time, that he had never asked her! And that, in truth, she did not know!

"I am inclined to believe that she did not. As abundance of experience is not precisely her lot in life a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment. It is the man who can and generally does 'see himself' pretty well inside and out. Women's self-possession is an outward thing; inwardly they flutter, perhaps because they are, or they feel themselves to be, encaged. All this speaking generally. In Flora de Barral's particular case ever since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified, because nothing can be worse than the eve of execution, but stunned, bewildered—abandoning herself passively. She did not want to make a sound, to move a limb. She hadn't the strength. What was the good? And deep down, almost unconsciously she was seduced by the feeling of being supported by this

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violence. A sensation she had never experienced before in her life.

"She felt as if this whirlwind were calming down somehow! As if this feeling of support, which was tempting her to close her eyes deliciously and let herself be carried on and on into the unknown undefiled by vile experiences, were less certain, had wavered threateningly. She tried to read something in his face, in that energetic kindly face to which she had become accustomed so soon. But she was not yet capable of understanding its expression. Scared, discouraged on the threshold of adolescence, plunged in moral misery of the bitterest kind, she had not learned to read—not that sort of language.

"If Anthony's love had been as egoistic as love generally is, it would have been greater than the egoism of his vanity—or of his generosity, if you like—and all this could not have happened. He would not have hit upon that renunciation at which one does not know whether to grin or shudder. It is true too that then his love would not have fastened itself upon the unhappy daughter of de Barral. But it was a love born of that rare pity which is not akin to contempt because rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness—the tenderness of the fiery predatory kind—the tenderness of silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind. At the same

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time I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous.

"'What big eyes she has,' he said to himself amazed. No wonder. She was staring at him with all the might of her soul awakening slowly from a poisoned sleep, in which it could only quiver with pain but could neither expand nor move. He plunged into them breathless and tense, deep, deep, like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time. And his vanity was immense. It had been touched to the quick by that muscular little feminist, Fyne. 'I! I! Take advantage of her helplessness. I! Unfair to that creature—that wisp of mist, that white shadow homeless in an ugly dirty world. I could blow her away with a breath,' he was saying to himself with horror. 'Never!' All the supremely refined delicacy of tenderness, expressed in so many fine lines of verse by Carleon Anthony, grew to the size of a passion filling with inward sobs the big frame of the man who had never in his life read a single one of those famous sonnets singing of the most highly civilised, chivalrous love, of those sonnets which . . . You know there's a volume of them. My edition has the portrait of the author at thirty and when I showed it to Mr. Powell the other day he exclaimed: 'Wonderful! One would think this the portrait of Captain

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Anthony himself if . . .' I wanted to know what that if was. But Powell could not say. There was something—a difference. No doubt there was—in fineness perhaps. The father fastidious, cerebral, morbidly shrinking from all contacts, could only sing in harmonius numbers of what the son felt with a dumb and reckless sincerity.

"Possessed by most strong men's touching illusion as to the frailness of women and their spiritual fragility, it seemed to Anthony that he would be destroying, breaking something very precious inside that being. In fact nothing less than partly murdering her. This seems a very extreme effect to flow from Fyne's words. But Anthony, unaccustomed to the chatter of the firm earth, never stayed to ask himself what value these words could have in Fyne's mouth. And indeed the mere dark sound of them was utterly abhorrent to his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day.

"He wished to blurt out his indignation but she regarded him with an expectant air which checked him. His visible discomfort made her uneasy. He could only repeat 'Oh yes. You are perfectly honest. You might have, but I daresay you are right. At any rate you have never said anything to me which you didn't mean.'

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"'Never,' she whispered after a pause.

"He seemed distracted, choking with an emotion she could not understand because it resembled embarrassment, a state of mind inconceivable in that man.

"She wondered what it was she had said; remembering that in very truth she had hardly spoken to him except when giving him the bare outline of her story which he seemed to have hardly had the patience to hear, waving it perpetually aside with exclamations of horror and anger, with fiercely sombre mutters 'Enough! Enough!' and with alarming starts from a forced stillness, as though he meant to rush out at once and take vengeance on somebody. She was saying to herself that he caught her words in the air, never letting her finish her thought. Honest. Honest. Yes certainly she had been that. Her letter to Mrs. Fyne had been prompted by honesty. But she reflected sadly that she had never known what to say to him. That perhaps she had nothing to say.

"'But you'll find out that I can be honest too,' he burst out in a menacing tone she had learned to appreciate, with an amused thrill.

"She waited for what was coming. But he hung in the wind. He looked round the room with disgust as if he could see traces on the walls of all the casual tenants that had ever passed through it. People had

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quarrelled in that room; they had been ill in it, there had been misery in that room, wickedness, crime perhaps—death most likely. This was not a fit place. He snatched up his hat. He had made up his mind. The ship—the ship he had known ever since she came off the stocks, his home—her shelter—the uncontaminated, honest ship, was the place.

"'Let us go on board. We'll talk there,' he said. 'And you will have to listen to me. For whatever happens, no matter what they say, I cannot let you go.'

"You can't say that (misgivings or no misgivings) she could have done anything else but go on board. It was the appointed business of that morning. During the drive he was silent. Anthony was the last man to condemn conventionally any human being, to scorn and despise even deserved misfortune. He was ready to take old de Barral—the convict—on his daughter's valuation without the slightest reserve. But love like his, though it may drive one into risky folly by the proud consciousness of its own strength, has a sagacity of its own. And now, as if lifted up into a higher and serene region by its purpose of renunciation, it gave him leisure to reflect for the first time in these last few days. He said to himself: 'I don't know that man. She does not know him either. She was barely sixteen when they locked him up. She was a child. What will he say? What will he do?

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No, he concluded, I cannot leave her behind with that man who would come into the world as if out of a grave.'

"They went on board in silence, and it was after showing her round and when they had returned to the saloon that he assailed her in his fiery, masterful fashion. At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody could love her. Humiliation clung to her like a cold shroud—never to be shaken off, unwarmed by this madness of generosity.

"'Yes. Here. Your home. I can't give it to you and go away, but it is big enough for us two. You need not be afraid. If you say so I shall not even look at you. Remember that grey head of which you have been thinking night and day. Where is it going to rest? Where else if not here, where nothing evil can touch it. Don't you understand that I won't let you buy shelter from me at the cost of your very soul. I won't. You are too much part of me. I have found myself since I came upon you and I would rather sell my own soul to the devil than let you go out of my keeping. But I must have the right.'

"He went away brusquely to shut the door leading

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on deck and came back the whole length of the cabin repeating:

"'I must have the legal right. Are you ashamed of letting people think you are my wife?'

"He opened his arms as if to clasp her to his breast but mastered the impulse and shook his clenched hands at her repeating: 'I must have the right if only for your father's sake. I must have the right. Where would you take him? To that infernal cardboard box maker. I don't know what keeps me from hunting him up in his virtuous home and bashing his head in. I can't bear the thought. Listen to me, Flora! Do you hear what I am saying to you? You are not so proud that you can't understand that I as a man have my pride too?'

"He saw a tear glide down her white cheek from under each lowered eyelid. Then, abruptly, she walked out of the cabin. He stood for a moment, concentrated, reckoning his own strength, interrogating his heart, before he followed her hastily. Already she had reached the wharf.

"At the sound of his pursuing footsteps her strength failed her. Where could she escape from this? From this new perfidy of life taking upon itself the form of magnanimity. His very voice was changed. The sustaining whirlwind had let her down, to stumble on again, weakened by the fresh stab, bereft of moral support

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which is wanted in life more than all the charities of material help. She had never had it. Never. Not from the Fynes. But where to go? Oh yes, this dock—a placid sheet of water close at hand. But there was that old man with whom she had walked hand in hand on the parade by the sea. She seemed to see him coming to meet her, pitiful, a little greyer, with an appealing look and an extended, tremulous arm. It was for her now to take the hand of that wronged man more helpless than a child. But where could she lead him? Where? And what was she to say to him? What words of cheer, of courage and of hope? There were none. Heaven and earth were mute, unconcerned at their meeting. But this other man was coming up behind her. He was very close now. His fiery person seemed to radiate heat, a tingling vibration into the atmosphere. She was exhausted, careless, afraid to stumble, ready to fall. She fancied she could hear his breathing. A wave of languid warmth overtook her, she seemed to lose touch with the ground under her feet; and when she felt him slip his hand under her arm she made no attempt to disengage herself from that grasp which closed upon her limb, insinuating and firm.

"He conducted her through the dangers of the quayside. Her sight was dim. A moving truck was like a mountain gliding by. Men passed by as if in a mist; and the buildings, the sheds, the unexpected open

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spaces, the ships, had strange, distorted, dangerous shapes. She said to herself that it was good not to be bothered with what all these things meant in the scheme of creation (if indeed anything had a meaning), or were just piled-up matter without any sense. She felt how she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow. It was a captivity. So be it. Till they got out into the street and saw the hansom waiting outside the gates Anthony spoke only once, beginning brusquely but in a much gentler tone than she had ever heard from his lips.

"'Of course I ought to have known that you could not care for a man like me, a stranger. Silence gives consent. Yes? Eh? I don't want any of that sort of consent. And unless some day you find you can speak . . . No! No! I shall never ask you. For all the sign I will give you you may go to your grave with sealed lips. But what I have said you must do!'

"He bent his head over her with tender care. At the same time she felt her arm pressed and shaken inconspicuously, but in an undeniable manner. 'You must do it.' A little shake that no passer-by could notice; and this was going on in a deserted part of the dock. 'It must be done. You are listening to me—eh? or would you go again to my sister?'

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"His ironic tone, perhaps from want of use, had an awful grating ferocity.

"'Would you go to her?' he pursued in the same strange voice. 'Your best friend! And say nicely—I am sorry. Would you? No! You couldn't. There are things that even you, poor dear lost girl, couldn't stand. Eh? Die rather. That's it. Of course. Or can you be thinking of taking your father to that infernal cousin's house. No! Don't speak. I can't bear to think of it. I would follow you there and smash the door!'

"The catch in his voice astonished her by its resemblance to a sob. It frightened her too. The thought that came to her head was: 'He mustn't.' He was putting her into the hansom. 'Oh! He mustn't, he mustn't.' She was still more frightened by the discovery that he was shaking all over. Bewildered, shrinking into the far off corner, avoiding his eyes, she yet saw the quivering of his mouth and made a wild attempt at a smile, which broke the rigidity of her lips and set her teeth chattering suddenly.

"'I am not coming with you,' he was saying. 'I'll tell the man . . . I can't. Better not. What is it? Are you cold? Come! What is it? Only to go to a confounded stuffy room, a hole of an office. Not a quarter of an hour. I'll come for you—in ten days. Don't think of it too much. Think of no man, woman

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or child of all that silly crowd cumbering the ground. Don't think of me either. Think of yourself. Ha! Nothing will be able to touch you then—at last. Say nothing. Don't move. I'll have everything arranged; and as long as you don't hate the sight of me—and you don't—there's nothing to be frightened about. One of their silly offices with a couple of ink-slingers of no consequence; poor, scribbling devils.'

"The hansom drove away with Flora de Barral inside, without movement, without thought, only too glad to rest, to be alone and still moving away without effort, in solitude and silence.

"Anthony roamed the streets for hours without being able to remember in the evening where he had been—in the manner of a happy and exulting lover. But nobody could have thought so from his face which bore no signs of blissful anticipation. Exulting indeed he was but it was a special sort of exultation which seemed to take him by the throat like an enemy.

"Anthony's last words to Flora referred to the registry-office where they were married ten days later. During that time Anthony saw no one or anything, though he went about restlessly, here and there, amongst men and things. This special state is peculiar to common lovers, who are known to have no eyes for anything except for the contemplation, actual or inward, of one human form which for them contains the

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soul of the whole world in all its beauty, perfection, variety and infinity. It must be extremely pleasant. But felicity was denied to Roderick Anthony's contemplation. He was not a common sort of lover; and he was punished for it as if Nature (which it is said abhors a vacuum) were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct. Roderick Anthony had begun already to suffer. That is why perhaps he was so industrious in going about amongst his fellowmen who would have been surprised and humiliated, had they known how little solidity and even existence they had in his eyes. But they could not suspect anything so queer. They saw nothing extraordinary in him during that fortnight. The proof of this is that they were willing to transact business with him. Obviously they were; since it is then that the offer of chartering his ship for the special purpose of proceeding to the Western Islands was put in his way by a firm of ship-brokers who had no doubt of his sanity.

"He probably looked sane enough for all the practical purposes of commercial life. But I am not so certain that he really was quite sane at that time.

"However he jumped at the offer. Providence itself was offering him this opportunity to accustom the girl to sea-life by a comparatively short trip. This was the time when everything that happened, everything he

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heard, casual words, unrelated phrases, seemed a provocation or an encouragement, confirmed him in his resolution. And indeed to be busy with material affairs is the best preservative against reflection, fears, doubts —all these things which stand in the way of achievement. I suppose a fellow proposing to cut his throat would experience a sort of relief while occupied in stropping his razor carefully.

"And Anthony was extremely careful in preparing for himself and for the luckless Flora, an impossible existence. He went about it with no more tremors than if he had been stuffed with rags or made of iron instead of flesh and blood. An existence, mind you, which, on shore, in the thick of mankind, of varied interests, of distractions, of infinite opportunities to preserve your distance from each other, is hardly conceivable; but on board ship, at sea, *en tête-à-tête* for days and weeks and months together, could mean nothing but mental torture, an exquisite absurdity of torment. He was a simple soul. His hopelessly masculine ingenuousness is displayed in a touching way by his care to procure some woman to attend on Flora. The condition of guaranteed perfect respectability gave him moments of anxious thought. When he remembered suddenly his steward's wife he must have exclaimed *eureka* with particular exultation. One does not like to call Anthony an ass. But really to put any

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woman within scenting distance of such a secret and suppose that she would not track it out!

"No woman, however simple, could be as ingenuous as that. I don't know how Flora de Barral qualified him in her thoughts when he told her of having done this amongst other things intended to make her comfortable. I should think that, for all *her* simplicity, she must have been appalled. He stood before her on the appointed day outwardly calmer than she had ever seen him before. And this very calmness, that scrupulous attitude which he felt bound in honour to assume then and for ever, unless she would condescend to make a sign at some future time, added to the heaviness of her heart innocent of the most pardonable guile.

"The night before she had slept better than she had done for the past ten nights. Both youth and weariness will assert themselves in the end against the tyranny of nerve-racking stress. She had slept but she woke up with her eyes full of tears. There were no traces of them when she met him in the shabby little parlour downstairs. She had swallowed them up. She was not going to let him see. She felt bound in honour to accept the situation for ever and ever unless . . . Ah, unless . . . She dissembled all her sentiments but it was not duplicity on her part. All she wanted was to get at the truth; to see what would come of it.

"She beat him at his own honourable game and

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the thoroughness of her serenity disconcerted Anthony a bit. It was he who stammered when it came to talking. That suppressed fierceness of his character carried him on after the first word or two masterfully enough. But it was as if they both had taken a bite of the same bitter fruit. He was thinking with mournful regret not unmixed with surprise: 'That fellow Fynel has been telling me the truth. She does not care for me a bit.' It humiliated him and also increased his compassion for the girl who in this darkness of life, buffeted and despairing, had fallen into the grip of his stronger will, abandoning herself to his arms as on a night of shipwreck. Flora on her side with partial insight (for women are never blind with the complete masculine blindness) looked on him with some pity; and she felt pity for herself too. It was a rejection, a casting out; nothing new to her. But she who supposed all her sensibility dead by this time, discovered in herself a resentment of this ultimate betrayal. She had no resignation for this one. With a sort of mental sullenness she said to herself: 'Well, I am here. I am here without any nonsense. It is not my fault that I am a mere worthless object of pity.'

"And these things which she could tell herself with a clear conscience served her better than the passionate obstinacy of purpose could serve Roderick Anthony. She was much more sure of herself than he was. Such

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are the advantages of mere rectitude over the most exalted generosity.

"And so they went out to get married, the people of the house where she lodged having no suspicion of anything of the sort. They were only excited at a 'gentleman friend' (a very fine man too) calling on Miss Smith for the first time since she had come to live in the house. When she returned, for she did come back alone, there were allusions made to that outing. She had to take her meals with these rather vulgar people. The woman of the house, a scraggy, genteel person, tried even to provoke confidences. Flora's white face with the deep blue eyes did not strike their hearts as it did the heart of Captain Anthony, as the very face of the suffering world. Her pained reserve had no power to awe them into decency.

"Well, she returned alone—as in fact might have been expected. After leaving the Registry Office Flora de Barral and Roderick Anthony had gone for a walk in a park. It must have been an East-end park but I am not sure. Anyway that's what they did. It was a sunny day. He said to her: 'Everything I have in the world belongs to you. I have seen to that without troubling my brother-in-law. They have no call to interfere.'

"She walked with her hand resting lightly on his arm. He had offered it to her on coming out of the

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Registry Office, and she had accepted it silently. Her head drooped, she seemed to be turning matters over in her mind. She said, alluding to the Fynes: 'They have been very good to me.' At that he exclaimed:

"'They have never understood you. Well, not properly. My sister is not a bad woman, but . . .'

"Flora didn't protest; asking herself whether he imagined that he himself understood her so much better. Anthony dismissing his family out of his thoughts went on: 'Yes. Everything is yours. I have kept nothing back. As to the piece of paper we have just got from that miserable quill-driver if it wasn't for the law, I wouldn't mind if you tore it up here, now, on this spot. But don't you do it. Unless you should some day feel that——'

"He choked, unexpectedly. She, reflective, hesitated a moment then making up her mind bravely.

"'Neither am I keeping anything back from you.'

"She had said it! But he in his blind generosity assumed that she was alluding to her deplorable history and hastened to mutter:

"'Of course! Of course! Say no more. I have been lying awake thinking of it all no end of times.'

"He made a movement with his other arm as if restraining himself from shaking an indignant fist at the universe; and she never even attempted to look at him. His voice sounded strangely, incredibly lifeless in com-

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parison with these tempestuous accents that in the broad fields, in the dark garden had seemed to shake the very earth under her weary and hopeless feet.

"She regretted them. Hearing the sigh which escaped her Anthony instead of shaking his fist at the universe began to pat her hand resting on his arm and then desisted, suddenly, as though he had burnt himself. Then after a silence:

"'You will have to go by yourself to-morrow. I . . . No, I think I mustn't come. Better not. What you two will have to say to each other——'

"She interrupted him quickly:

"'Father is an innocent man. He was cruelly wronged.'

"'Yes. That's why,' Anthony insisted earnestly. 'And you are the only human being that can make it up to him. You alone must reconcile him with the world if anything can. But of course you shall. You'll have to find words. Oh you'll know. And then the sight of you, alone, would soothe——'

"'He's the gentlest of men,' she interrupted again.

"Anthony shook his head. 'It would take no end of generosity, no end of gentleness to forgive such a dead set. For my part I would have liked better to have been killed and done with at once. It could not have been worse for you—and I suppose it was of you that he was thinking most while those infernal lawyers

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were badgering him in court. Of you. And now I think of it perhaps the sight of you may bring it all back to him. All these years, all these years—and you his child left alone in the world. I should have gone crazy. For even if he had done wrong——'

"'But he hasn't,' insisted Flora de Barral with a quite unexpected fierceness. 'You mustn't even suppose it. Haven't you read the accounts of the trial?'

"'I am not supposing anything,' Anthony defended himself. He just remembered hearing of the trial. He assured her that he was away from England, the second voyage of the *Ferndale*. He was crossing the Pacific from Australia at the time and didn't see any papers for weeks and weeks. He interrupted himself to suggest:

"'You had better tell him at once that you are happy.'

"He had stammered a little, and Flora de Barral uttered a deliberate and concise 'Yes.'

"A short silence ensued. She withdrew her hand from his arm. They stopped. Anthony looked as if a totally unexpected catastrophe had happened.

"'Ah,' he said. 'You mind . . .'

"'No! I think I had better,' she murmured.

"'I daresay. I daresay. Bring him along straight on board to-morrow. Stop nowhere.'

"She had a movement of vague gratitude, a mo-

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mentary feeling of peace which she referred to the man before her. She looked up at Anthony. His face was sombre. He was miles away and muttered as if to himself:

"'Where could he want to stop though?'

"'There's not a single being on earth that I would want to look at his dear face now, to whom I would willingly take him,' she said extending her hand frankly and with a slight break in her voice, 'but you—Roderick.'

"He took that hand, felt it very small and delicate in his broad palm.

"'That's right. That's right,' he said with a conscious and hasty heartiness and, as if suddenly ashamed of the sound of his voice, turned half round and absolutely walked away from the motionless girl. He even resisted the temptation to look back till it was too late. The gravel path lay empty to the very gate of the park. She was gone—vanished. He had an impression that he had missed some sort of chance. He felt sad. That excited sense of his own conduct which had kept him up for the last ten or more days buoyed him no more. He had succeeded!

"He strolled on aimlessly a prey to gentle melancholy. He walked and walked. There were but few people about in this breathing space of a poor neighbourhood. Under certain conditions of life there is

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precious little time left for mere breathing. But still a few here and there were indulging in that luxury; yet few as they were Captain Anthony, though the least exclusive of men, resented their presence. Solitude had been his best friend. He wanted some place where he could sit down and be alone. And in his need his thoughts turned to the sea which had given him so much of that congenial solitude. There, if always with his ship (but that was an integral part of him) he could always be as solitary as he chose. Yes. Get out to sea!

"The night of the town with its strings of lights, rigid and crossed like a net of flames, thrown over the sombre immensity of walls, closed round him, with its artificial brilliance overhung by an emphatic blackness, its unnatural animation of a restless, overdriven humanity. His thoughts which somehow were inclined to pity every passing figure, every single person glimpsed under a street lamp, fixed themselves at last upon a figure which certainly could not have been seen under the lamps on that particular night. A figure unknown to him. A figure shut up within high unscaleable walls of stone or bricks till next morning . . . The figure of Flora de Barral's father. De Barral the financier—the convict.

"There is something in that word with its suggestions of guilt and retribution which arrests the thought.

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We feel ourselves in the presence of the power of organised society—a thing mysterious in itself and still more mysterious in its effect. Whether guilty or innocent, it was as if old de Barral had been down to the Nether Regions. Impossible to imagine what he would bring out from there to the light of this world of uncondemned men. What would he think? What would he have to say? And what was one to say to him?

"Anthony, a little awed, as one is by a range of feelings stretching beyond one's grasp, comforted himself by the thought that probably the old fellow would have little to say. He wouldn't want to talk about it. No man would. It must have been a real hell to him.

"And then Anthony, at the end of the day in which he had gone through a marriage-ceremony with Flora de Barral, ceased to think of Flora's father except, as in some sort, the captive of his triumph. He turned to the mental contemplation of the white, delicate and appealing face with great blue eyes which he had seen weep and wonder and look profoundly at him, sometimes with incredulity, sometimes with doubt and pain, but always irresistible in the power to find their way right into his breast, to stir there a deep response which was something more than love — he said to himself, — as men understand it. More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other.

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More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms—all the suffering world, not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.

"Anthony walked slowly to the ship and that night slept without dreams.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT DE BARRAL.

"RENOVATED certainly the saloon of the *Ferndale* was to receive the 'strange woman.' The mellowness of its old-fashioned, tarnished decoration was gone And Anthony looking round saw the glitter, the gleams, the colour of new things, untried, unused, very bright —too bright. The workmen had gone only last night; and the last piece of work they did was the hanging of the heavy curtains which looped midway the length of the saloon—divided it in two if released, cutting off the after end with its companion-way leading direct on the poop, from the forepart with its outlet on the deck; making a privacy within a privacy, as though Captain Anthony could not place obstacles enough between his new happiness and the men who shared his life at sea. He inspected that arrangement with an

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approving eye then made a particular visitation of the whole, ending by opening a door which led into a large state-room made of two knocked into one. It was very well furnished and had, instead of the usual bed-place of such cabins, an elaborate swinging cot of the latest pattern. Anthony tilted it a little by way of trial. 'The old man will be very comfortable in here,' he said to himself, and stepped back into the saloon closing the door gently. Then another thought occurred to him obvious under the circumstances but strangely enough presenting itself for the first time. 'Jove! Won't he get a shock,' thought Roderick Anthony.

"He went hastily on deck. 'Mr. Franklin, Mr. Franklin.' The mate was not very far. 'Oh! Here you are. Miss . . . Mrs. Anthony'll be coming on board presently. Just give me a call when you see the cab.'

"Then, without noticing the gloominess of the mate's countenance he went in again. Not a friendly word, not a professional remark, or a small joke, not as much as a simple and inane 'fine day.' Nothing. Just turned about and went in.

"We know that, when the moment came, he thought better of it and decided to meet Flora's father in that privacy of the main cabin which he had been so careful to arrange. Why Anthony appeared

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to shrink from the contact, he who was sufficiently self-confident not only to face but to absolutely create a situation almost insane in its audacious generosity, is difficult to explain. Perhaps when he came on the poop for a glance he found that man so different outwardly from what he expected that he decided to meet him for the first time out of everybody's sight. Possibly the general secrecy of his relation to the girl might have influenced him. Truly he may well have been dismayed. That man's coming brought him face to face with the necessity to speak and act a lie; to appear what he was not and what he could never be, unless, unless——

"In short we'll say if you like that for various reasons, all having to do with the delicate rectitude of his nature, Roderick Anthony (a man of whom his chief mate used to say: he doesn't know what fear is) was frightened. There is a Nemesis which overtakes generosity too, like all the other imprudences of men who dare to be lawless and proud . . ."

"Why do you say this?" I enquired, for Marlow had stopped abruptly and kept silent in the shadow of the bookcase.

"I say this because that man whom chance had thrown in Flora's way was both: lawless and proud. Whether he knew anything about it or not it does not matter. Very likely not. One may fling a glove in

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the face of nature and in the face of one's own moral endurance quite innocently, with a simplicity which wears the aspect of perfectly Satanic conceit. However, as I have said it does not matter. It's a transgression all the same and has got to be paid for in the usual way. But never mind that. I paused because, like Anthony, I find a difficulty, a sort of dread in coming to grips with old de Barral.

"You remember I had a glimpse of him once. He was not an imposing personality: tall, thin, straight, stiff, faded, moving with short steps and with a gliding motion, speaking in an even low voice. When the sea was rough he wasn't much seen on deck—at least not walking. He caught hold of things then and dragged himself along as far as the after skylight where he would sit for hours. Our, then young, friend offered once to assist him and this service was the first beginning of a sort of friendship. He clung hard to one—Powell says, with no figurative intention. Powell was always on the lookout to assist, and to assist mainly Mrs. Anthony, because he clung so jolly hard to her that Powell was afraid of her being dragged down notwithstanding that she very soon became very sure-footed in all sorts of weather. And Powell was the only one ready to assist at hand because Anthony (by that time) seemed to be afraid to come near them; the unforgiving Franklin always looked wrath-

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fully the other way; the boatswain, if up there, acted in the same way, sheepishly; and any hands that happened to be on the poop (a feeling spreads mysteriously all over a ship) shunned him as though he had been the devil.

"We know how he arrived on board. For my part I know so little of prisons that I haven't the faintest notion how one leaves them. It seems as abominable an operation as the other, the shutting up with its mental suggestions of bang, snap, crash and the empty silence outside—where an instant before you were—you *were*—and now no longer are. Perfectly devilish. And the release! I don't know which is worse. How do they do it? Pull the string, door flies open, man flies through: out you go! *Adios!* And in the space where a second before you were not, in the silent space there is a figure going away, limping. Why limping? I don't know. That's how I see it. One has a notion of a maiming, crippling process; of the individual coming back damaged in some subtle way. I admit it is a fantastic hallucination, but I can't help it. Of course I know that the proceedings of the best machine-made humanity are employed with judicious care and so on. I am absurd, no doubt, but still . . . Oh yes, it's idiotic. When I pass one of these places . . . did you notice that there is something infernal about the aspect of every individual stone or brick of them, something

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malicious as if matter were enjoying its revenge of the contemptuous spirit of man: Did you notice? You didn't? Eh? Well I am perhaps a little mad on that point. When I pass one of these places I must avert my eyes. I couldn't have gone to meet de Barral. I should have shrunk from the ordeal. You'll notice that it looks as if Anthony (a brave man indubitably) had shirked it too. Little Fyne's flight of fancy picturing three people in the fatal four wheeler—you remember? —went wide of the truth. There were only two people in the four wheeler. Flora did not shrink. Women can stand anything. The dear creatures have no imagination when it comes to solid facts of life. In sentimental regions—I won't say. It's another thing altogether. There they shrink from or rush to embrace ghosts of their own creation just the same as any fool-man would.

"No. I suppose the girl Flora went on that errand reasonably. And then, why! This was the moment for which she had lived. It was her only point of contact with existence. Oh yes. She had been assisted by the Fynes. And kindly. Certainly. Kindly. But that's not enough. There is a kind way of assisting our fellow creatures which is enough to break their hearts while it saves their outer envelope. Now cold, how infernally cold she must have felt—unless when she was made to burn with indignation or shame. Man, we know, cannot

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live by bread alone but hang me if I don't believe that some women could live by love alone. If there be a flame in human beings fed by varied ingredients earthly and spiritual which tinge it in different hues, then I seem to see the colour of theirs. It is azure . . . What the devil are you laughing at . . ."

Marlow jumped up and strode out of the shadow as if lifted by indignation, but there was the flicker of a smile on his lips. "You say I don't know women. Maybe. It's just as well not to come too close to the shrine. But I have a clear notion of *woman*. In all of them, termagant, flirt, crank, washerwoman, blue-stocking, outcast and even in the ordinary fool of the ordinary commerce there is something left, if only a spark. And when there is a spark there can always be a flame . . ."

He went back into the shadow and sat down again.

"I don't mean to say that Flora de Barral was one of the sort that could live by love alone. In fact she had managed to live without. But still, in the distrust of herself and of others she looked for love, any kind of love, as women will. And that confounded jail was the only spot where she could see it—for she had no reason to distrust her father.

"She was there in good time. I see her gazing across the road at these walls which are, properly speaking, awful. You do indeed seem to feel along the very lines and angles of the unholy bulk, the fall of time,

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drop by drop, hour by hour, leaf by leaf, with a gentle and implacable slowness. And a voiceless melancholy comes over one, invading, overpowering like a dream, penetrating and mortal like poison.

"When de Barral came out she experienced a sort of shock to see that he was exactly as she remembered him. Perhaps a little smaller. Otherwise unchanged. You come out in the same clothes, you know. I can't tell whether he was looking for her. No doubt he was. Whether he recognised her? Very likely. She crossed the road and at once there was reproduced at a distance of years, as if by some mocking witchcraft, the sight so familiar on the Parade at Hove of the financier de Barral walking with his only daughter. One comes out of prison in the same clothes one wore on the day of condemnation, no matter how long one has been put away there. Oh, they last! They last! But there is something which is preserved by prison life even better than one's discarded clothing. It is the force, the vividness of one's sentiments. A monastery will do that too; but in the unholy claustration of a jail you are thrown back wholly upon yourself—for God and Faith are not there. The people outside disperse their affections, you hoard yours, you nurse them into intensity. What they let slip, what they forget in the movement and changes of free life, you hold on to, amplify, exaggerate into a monstrous growth of memories. They can look with a

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smile at the troubles and pains of the past; but you can't. Old pains keep on gnawing at your heart, old desires, old deceptions, old dreams, assailing you in the dead stillness of your present where nothing moves except the irrecoverable minutes of your life.

"De Barral was out and, for a time speechless, being led away almost before he had taken possession of the free world, by his daughter. Flora controlled herself well. They walked along quickly for some distance. The cab had been left round the corner—round several corners for all I know. He was flustered, out of breath, when she helped him in and followed herself. Inside that rolling box, turning towards that recovered presence with her heart too full for words, she felt the desire of tears she had managed to keep down abandon her suddenly, her half-mournful, half-triumphant exultation subside, every fibre of her body, relaxed in tenderness, go stiff in the close look she took at his face. He *was* different. There was something. Yes, there was something between them, something hard and impalpable, the ghost of these high walls.

"How old he was, how unlike!

"She shook off this impression, amazed and frightened by it of course. And remorseful too. Naturally. She threw her arms round his neck. He returned that hug awkwardly, as if not in perfect control of his arms, with a fumbling and uncertain pressure. She hid her face

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on his breast. It was as though she were pressing it against a stone. They released each other and presently the cab was rolling along at a jog-trot to the docks with those two people as far apart as they could get from each other, in opposite corners.

"After a silence given up to mutual examination he uttered his first coherent sentence outside the walls of the prison.

"'What has done for me was envy. Envy. There was a lot of them just bursting with it every time they looked my way. I was doing too well. So they went to the public prosecutor——'

"She said hastily 'Yes! Yes! I know,' and he glared as if resentful that the child had turned into a young woman without waiting for him to come out. 'What do you know about it?' he asked. 'You were too young.' His speech was soft. The old voice, the old voice! It gave her a thrill. She recognised its pointless gentleness always the same no matter what he had to say. And she remembered that he never had much to say when he came down to see her. It was she who chattered, chattered, on their walks, while stiff and with a rigidly-carried head, he dropped a gentle word now and then.

"Moved by these recollections waking up within her, she explained to him that within the last year she had read and studied the report of the trial.

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"'I went through the files of several papers, papa.'

"He looked at her suspiciously. The reports were probably very incomplete. No doubt the reporters had garbled his evidence. They were determined to give him no chance either in court or before the public opinion. It was a conspiracy. . . . 'My counsel was a fool too,' he added. 'Did you notice? A perfect fool.'

"She laid her hand on his arm soothingly. 'Is it worth while talking about that awful time? It is so far away now.' She shuddered slightly at the thought of all the horrible years which had passed over her young head; never guessing that for him the time was but yesterday. He folded his arms on his breast, leaned back in his corner and bowed his head. But in a little while he made her jump by asking suddenly:

"'Who has got hold of the Lone Valley Railway? That's what they were after mainly. Somebody has got it. Parfitts and Co. grabbed it—eh? Or was it that fellow Warner. . . .'

"'I—I don't know,' she said quite scared by the twitching of his lips.

"'Don't know!' he exclaimed softly. Hadn't her cousin told her? Oh yes. She had left them—of course. Why did she? It was his first question about herself but she did not answer it. She did not want to talk of

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these horrors. They were impossible to describe. She perceived though that he had not expected an answer, because she heard him muttering to himself that: 'There was half a million's worth of work done and material accumulated there.'

"'You mustn't think of these things, papa,' she said firmly. And he asked her with that invariable gentleness, in which she seemed now to detect some rather ugly shades, what else had he to think about? Another year or two, if they had only left him alone, he and everybody else would have been all right, rolling in money; and she, his daughter, could have married anybody—anybody. A lord.

"All this was to him like yesterday, a long yesterday, a yesterday gone over innumerable times, analysed, meditated upon for years. It had a vividness and force for that old man of which his daughter who had not been shut out of the world could have no idea. She was to him the only living figure out of that past and it was perhaps in perfect good faith that he added, coldly, inexpressive and thin-lipped: 'I lived only for you, I may say. I suppose you understand that. There were only you and me.'

"Moved by this declaration, wondering that it did not warm her heart more, she murmured a few endearing words while the uppermost thought in her mind was that she must tell him now of the situation. She had

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expected to be questioned anxiously about herself—and while she desired it she shrank from the answers she would have to make. But her father seemed strangely, unnaturally incurious. It looked as if there would be no questions. Still this was an opening. This seemed to be the time for her to begin. And she began. She began by saying that she had always felt like that. There were two of them, to live for each other. And if he only knew what she had gone through!

"Ensconced in his corner, with his arms folded, he stared out of the cab window at the street. How little he was changed after all. It was the unmovable expression, the faded stare she used to see on the esplanade whenever walking by his side hand in hand she raised her eyes to his face—while she chattered, chattered. It was the same stiff, silent figure which at a word from her would turn rigidly into a shop and buy her anything it occurred to her that she would like to have. Flora de Barral's voice faltered. He bent on her that well-remembered glance in which she had never read anything as a child, except the consciousness of her existence. And that was enough for a child who had never known demonstrative affection. But she had lived a life so starved of all feeling that this was no longer enough for her. What was the good of telling him the story of all these miseries now past and gone, of all those bewildering difficulties and humiliations? What she *must* tell him

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was difficult enough to say. She approached it by remarking cheerfully:

"'You haven't even asked me where I am taking you.'

"He started like a somnambulist awakened suddenly, and there was now some meaning in his stare; a sort of alarmed speculation. He opened his mouth slowly. Flora struck in with forced gaiety. 'You would never guess.'

"He waited, still more startled and suspicious. 'Guess! Why don't you tell me?'

"He uncrossed his arms and leaned forwards towards her. She got hold of one of his hands. 'You must know first . . .' She paused, made an effort: 'I am married, papa.'

"For a moment they kept perfectly still in that cab rolling on at a steady jog-trot through a narrow city street full of bustle. Whatever she expected she did not expect to feel his hand snatched away from her grasp as if from a burn or a contamination. De Barral fresh from the stagnant torment of the prison (where nothing happens) had not expected that sort of news. It seemed to stick in his throat. In strangled low tones he cried out 'You—married? You, Flora! When? Married! What for? Who to? Married!'

"His eyes which were blue like hers, only faded, without depth, seemed to start out of their orbits. He

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did really look as if he were choking. He even put his hand to his collar . . ."

"You know," continued Marlow out of the shadow of the bookcase and nearly invisible in the depths of the armchair, "the only time I saw him he had given me the impression of absolute rigidity, as though he had swallowed a poker. But it seems that he could collapse. I can hardly picture this to myself. I understand that he did collapse to a certain extent in his corner of the cab. The unexpected had crumpled him up. She regarded him perplexed, pitying, a little disillusioned, and nodded at him gravely: Yes. Married. What she did not like was to see him smile in a manner far from encouraging to the devotion of a daughter. There was something unintentionally savage in it. Old de Barral could not quite command his muscles, as yet. But he had recovered command of his gentle voice.

"'You were just saying that in this wide world there we were, only you and I, to stick to each other.'

"She was dimly aware of the scathing intention lurking in these soft low tones, in these words which appealed to her poignantly. She defended herself. Never, never for a single moment had she ceased to think of him. Neither did he cease to think of her, he said, with as much sinister emphasis as he was capable of.

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"'But, papa,' she cried, 'I haven't been shut up like you.' She didn't mind speaking of it because he was innocent. He hadn't been understood. It was a misfortune of the most cruel kind but no more disgraceful than an illness, a maiming accident or some other visitation of blind fate. 'I wish I had been too. But I was alone out in the world, the horrid world, that very world which had used you so badly.'

"'And you couldn't go about in it without finding somebody to fall in love with?' he said. A jealous rage affected his brain like the fumes of wine, rising from some secret depths of his being so long deprived of all emotions. The hollows at the corners of his lips became more pronounced in the puffy roundness of his cheeks. Images, visions, obsess with particular force men withdrawn from the sights and sounds of active life. 'And I did nothing but think of you!' he exclaimed under his breath, contemptuously. 'Think of you! You haunted me, I tell you.'

"Flora said to herself that there was a being who loved her. 'Then we have been haunting each other,' she declared with a pang of remorse. For indeed he had haunted her nearly out of the world, into a final and irremediable desertion. 'Some day I shall tell you . . . No. I don't think I can ever tell you. There was a time when I was mad. But what's the good? It's all over now. We shall forget all this. There shall be nothing to remind us.'

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"De Barral moved his shoulders.

"'I should think you were mad to tie yourself to . . . How long is it since you were married?'

"She answered 'Not long' that being the only answer she dared to make. Everything was so different from what she imagined it would be. He wanted to know why she had said nothing of it in any of her letters; in her last letter. She said:

"'It was after.'

"'So recently!' he wondered. 'Couldn't you wait at least till I came out? You could have told me; asked me; consulted me! Let me see——'

"She shook her head negatively. And he was appalled. He thought to himself: Who can he be? Some miserable, silly youth without a penny. Or perhaps some scoundrel? Without making any expressive movement he wrung his loosely-clasped hands till the joints cracked. He looked at her. She was pretty. Some low scoundrel who will cast her off. Some plausible vagabond. . . . 'You couldn't wait—eh?'

"Again she made a slight negative sign.

"'Why not? What was the hurry?' She cast down her eyes. 'It had to be. Yes. It was sudden, but it had to be.'

"He leaned towards her, his mouth open, his eyes wild with virtuous anger, but meeting the absolute

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candour of her raised glance threw himself back into his corner again.

"'So tremendously in love with each other—was that it? Couldn't let a father have his daughter all to himself even for a day after—after such a separation. And you know I never had anyone, I had no friends. What did I want with those people one meets in the City. The best of them are ready to cut your throat. Yes! Business men, gentlemen, any sort of men and women—out of spite, or to get something. Oh yes, they can talk fair enough if they think there's something to be got out of you. . . .' His voice was a mere breath yet every word came to Flora as distinctly as if charged with all the moving power of passion. . . . 'My girl, I looked at them making up to me and I would say to myself: What do I care for all that! I am a business man. I am the great Mr. de Barral (yes, yes, some of them twisted their mouths at it, but I *was* the great Mr. de Barral) and I have my little girl. I wanted nobody and I have never had anybody.'

"A true emotion had unsealed his lips but the words that came out of them were no louder than the murmur of a light wind. It died away.

"'That's just it,' said Flora de Barral under her breath. Without removing his eyes from her he took off his hat. It was a tall hat. The hat of the trial. The hat of the thumb-nail sketches in the illustrated

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papers. One comes out in the same clothes, but seclusion counts! It is well-known that lurid visions haunt secluded men, monks, hermits—then why not prisoners? De Barral the convict took off the silk hat of the financier de Barral and deposited it on the front seat of the cab. Then he blew out his cheeks. He was red in the face.

"'And then what happens?' he began again in his contained voice. 'Here I am, overthrown, broken by envy, malice, and all uncharitableness. I come out—and what do I find? I find that my girl Flora has gone and married some man or other, perhaps a fool, how do I know; or perhaps—anyway not good enough.'

"'Stop, papa.'

"'A silly love-affair as likely as not,' he continued monotonously, his thin lips writhing between the ill-omened sunk corners. 'And a very suspicious thing it is too, on the part of a loving daughter.'

"She tried to interrupt him but he went on till she actually clapped her hand on his mouth. He rolled his eyes a bit but when she took her hand away he remained silent.

"'Wait. I must tell you. . . . And first of all, papa, understand this, for everything's in that: he is the most generous man in the world. He is . . .'

"De Barral very still in his corner uttered with an effort:

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"'You are in love with him.'

"'Papa! He came to me. I was thinking of you. I had no eyes for anybody. I could no longer bear to think of you. It was then that he came. Only then. At that time when—when I was going to give up.'

"She gazed into his faded blue eyes as if yearning to be understood, to be given encouragement, peace—a word of sympathy. He declared without animation:

"'I would like to break his neck.'

"She had the mental exclamation of the overburdened. 'Oh, my God!' and watched him with frightened eyes. But he did not appear insane or in any other way formidable. This comforted her. The silence lasted for some little time. Then suddenly he asked:

"'What's your name then?'

"For a moment in the profound trouble of the task before her she did not understand what the question meant. Then, her face faintly flushing, she whispered: 'Anthony.'

"Her father, a red spot on each cheek, leaned his head back wearily in the corner of the cab.

"'Anthony. What is he? Where did he spring from?'

"'Papa, it was in the country, on a road——'

"He groaned, 'On a road,' and closed his eyes.

"'It's too long to explain to you now. We shall

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have lots of time. There are things I could not tell you now. But some day. Some day. For now nothing can part us. Nothing. We are safe as long as we live—nothing can ever come between us.'

"'You are infatuated with the fellow,' he remarked, without opening his eyes. And she said: 'I believe in him,' in a low voice. 'You and I must believe in him?'

"'Who the devil is he?'

"'He's the brother of the lady—you know Mrs. Fyne, she knew mother—who was so kind to me. I was staying in the country, in a cottage, with Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. It was there that we met. He came on a visit. He noticed me. I—well—we are married now.'

"She was thankful that his eyes were shut. It made it easier to talk of the future she had arranged, which now was an unalterable thing. She did not enter on the path of confidences. That was impossible. She felt he would not understand her. She felt also that he suffered. Now and then a great anxiety gripped her heart with a mysterious sense of guilt—as though she had betrayed him into the hands of an enemy. With his eyes shut he had an air of weary and pious meditation. She was a little afraid of it. Next moment a great pity for him filled her heart. And in the background there was remorse. His face twitched now and then just perceptibly. He managed to keep his eyelids down till he heard that the 'husband' was a sailor and

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that he, the father, was being taken straight on board ship ready to sail away from this abominable world of treacheries, and scorns and envies and lies, away, away over the blue sea, the sure, the inaccessible, the uncontaminated and spacious refuge for wounded souls.

"Something like that. Not the very words perhaps but such was the general sense of her overwhelming argument—the argument of refuge.

"I don't think she gave a thought to material conditions. But as part of that argument set forth breathlessly, as if she were afraid that if she stopped for a moment she could never go on again, she mentioned that generosity of a stormy type, which had come to her from the sea, had caught her up on the brink of unmentionable failure, had whirled her away in its first ardent gust and could be trusted now, implicitly trusted, to carry them both, side by side, into absolute safety.

"She believed it, she affirmed it. He understood thoroughly at last, and at once the interior of that cab, of an aspect so pacific in the eyes of the people on the pavements, became the scene of a great agitation. The generosity of Roderick Anthony—the son of the poet—affected the ex-financier de Barral in a manner which must have brought home to Flora de Barral the extreme arduousness of the business of being a woman. Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade since it consists principally of dealings with men. This man—the man

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inside the cab—cast off his stiff placidity and behaved like an animal. I don't mean it in an offensive sense. What he did was to give way to an instinctive panic. Like some wild creature scared by the first touch of a net falling on its back, old de Barral began to struggle, lank and angular, against the empty air—as much of it as there was in the cab—with staring eyes and gasping mouth from which his daughter shrank as far as she could in the confined space.

"'Stop the cab. Stop him, I tell you. Let me get out!' were the strangled exclamations she heard. Why? What for? To do what? He would hear nothing. She cried to him 'Papa! Papa! What do you want to do?' And all she got from him was: 'Stop. I must get out. I want to think. I must get out to think.'

"It was a mercy that he didn't attempt to open the door at once. He only stuck his head and shoulders out of the window crying to the cabman. She saw the consequences, the cab stopping, a crowd collecting around a raving old gentleman.... In this terrible business of being a woman so full of fine shades, of delicate perplexities (and very small rewards) you can never know what rough work you may have to do, at any moment. Without hesitation Flora seized her father round the body and pulled back—being astonished at the ease with which she managed to make him drop into his seat again. She kept him there resolutely with

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one hand pressed against his breast, and leaning across him, she, in her turn put her head and shoulders out of the window. By then the cab had drawn up to the curbstone and was stopped. 'No! I've changed my mind. Go on please where you were told first. To the docks.'

"She wondered at the steadiness of her own voice. She heard a grunt from the driver and the cab began to roll again. Only then she sank into her place keeping a watchful eye on her companion. He was hardly anything more by this time. Except for her childhood's impressions he was just—a man. Almost a stranger. How was one to deal with him? And there was the other too. Also almost a stranger. The trade of being a woman was very difficult. Too difficult. Flora closed her eyes saying to herself: 'If I think too much about it I shall go mad.' And then opening them she asked her father if the prospect of living always with his daughter and being taken care of by her affection away from the world, which had no honour to give to his grey hairs, was such an awful prospect.

"'Tell me, is it so bad as that?'

"She put that question sadly, without bitterness. The famous—or notorious—de Barral had lost his rigidity now. He was bent. Nothing more deplorably futile than a bent poker. He said nothing. She added gently, suppressing an uneasy remorseful sigh:

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"'And it might have been worse. You might have found no one, no one in all this town, no one in all the world, not even me! Poor papa!'

"She made a conscience-stricken movement towards him thinking: 'Oh! I am horrible, I am horrible.' And old de Barral, scared, tired, bewildered by the extraordinary shocks of his liberation, swayed over and actually leaned his head on her shoulder, as if sorrowing over his regained freedom.

"The movement by itself was touching. Flora supporting him lightly imagined that he was crying; and at the thought that had she smashed in a quarry that shoulder, together with some other of her bones, this grey and pitiful head would have had nowhere to rest, she too gave way to tears. They flowed quietly easing her overstrained nerves. Suddenly he pushed her away from him so that her head struck the side of the cab, pushing himself away too from her as if something had stung him.

"All the warmth went out of her emotion. The very last tears turned cold on her cheek. But their work was done. She had found courage, resolution, as women do, in a good cry. With his hand covering the upper part of his face whether to conceal his eyes or to shut out an unbearable sight, he was stiffening up in his corner to his usual poker-like consistency. She regarded him in silence. His thin obstinate lips moved. He

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uttered the name of the cousin—the man, you remember, who did not approve of the Fynes, and whom rightly or wrongly little Fyne suspected of interested motives, in view of de Barral having possibly put away some plunder, somewhere before the smash.

"I may just as well tell you at once that I don't know anything more of him. But de Barral was of the opinion, speaking in his low voice from under his hand, that this relation would have been only too glad to have secured his guidance.

"'Of course I could not come forward in my own name, or person. But the advice of a man of my experience is as good as a fortune to anybody wishing to venture into finance. The same sort of thing can be done again.'

"He shuffled his feet a little, let fall his hand; and turning carefully toward his daughter his puffy round cheeks, his round chin resting on his collar, he bent on her the faded, resentful gaze of his pale eyes, which were wet.

"'The start is really only a matter of judicious advertising. There's no difficulty. And here you go and . . .'

"He turned his face away. 'After all I am still de Barral, *the* de Barral. Didn't you remember that?'

"'Papa,' said Flora; 'listen. It's you who must remember that there is no longer a de Barral. . . .' He

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looked at her sideways anxiously. 'There is Mr. Smith, whom no harm, no trouble, no wicked lies of evil people can ever touch.'

"'Mr. Smith,' he breathed out slowly. 'Where does he belong to? There's not even a Miss Smith.'

"'There is your Flora.'

"'My Flora! You went and . . . I can't bear to think of it. It's horrible.'

"'Yes. It was horrible enough at times,' she said with feeling, because somehow, obscurely, what this man said appealed to her as if it were her own thought clothed in an enigmatic emotion. 'I think with shame sometimes how I . . . No not yet. I shall not tell you yet. At least not now.'

"The cab turned into the gateway of the dock. Flora handed the tall hat to her father. 'Here, papa. And please be good. I suppose you love me. If you don't, then I wonder who——'

"He put the hat on, and stiffened hard in his corner, kept a sidelong glance on his girl. 'Try to be nice for my sake. Think of the years I have been waiting for you. I do indeed want support—and peace. A little peace.'

"She clasped his arm suddenly with both hands pressing with all her might as if to crush the resistance she felt in him. 'I could not have peace if I did not have you with me. I won't let you go. Not after all I

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went through. I won't.' The nervous force of her grip frightened him a little. She laughed suddenly. 'It's absurd. It's as if I were asking you for a sacrifice. What am I afraid of? Where could you go? I mean now, to-day, to-night? You can't tell me. Have you thought of it? Well I have been thinking of it for the last year. Longer. I nearly went mad trying to find out. I believe I was mad for a time or else I should never have thought . . .'

"This was as near as she came to a confession," remarked Marlow in a changed tone. "The confession I mean of that walk to the top of the quarry which she reproached herself with so bitterly. And he made of it what his fancy suggested. It could not possibly be a just notion. The cab stopped alongside the ship and they got out in the manner described by the sensitive Franklin. I don't know if they suspected each other's sanity at the end of that drive. But that is possible. We all seem a little mad to each other; an excellent arrangement for the bulk of humanity which finds in it an easy motive of forgiveness. Flora crossed the quarter-deck with a rapidity born of apprehension. It had grown unbearable. She wanted this business over. She was thankful on looking back to see he was following her. 'If he bolts away,' she thought, 'then I shall know

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that I am of no account indeed! That no one loves me, that words and actions and protestations and everything in the world is false—and I shall jump into the dock. *That* at least won't lie.'

"Well, I don't know. If it had come to that she would have been most likely fished out, what with her natural want of luck and the good many people on the quay and on board. And just where the *Ferndale* was moored there hung on a wall (I know the berth) a coil of line, a pole, and a life-buoy kept there on purpose to fish out people who tumble into the dock. It's not so easy to get away from life's betrayals as she thought. However it did not come to that. He followed her with his quick gliding walk. Mr. Smith! The liberated convict de Barral passed off the solid earth for the last time, vanished for ever, and there was Mr. Smith added to that world of waters which harbours so many queer fishes. An old gentleman in a silk hat, darting wary glances. He followed, because mere existence has its claims which are obeyed mechanically. I have no doubt he presented a respectable figure. Father-in-law. Nothing more respectable. But he carried in his heart the confused pain of dismay and affection, of involuntary repulsion and pity. Very much like his daughter. Only in addition he felt a furious jealousy of the man he was going to see.

"A residue of egoism remains in every affection—

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even paternal. And this man in the seclusion of his prison had thought himself into such a sense of ownership of that single human being he had to think about, as may well be inconceivable to us who have not had to serve a long (and wickedly unjust) sentence of penal servitude. She was positively the only thing, the one point where his thoughts found a resting-place, for years. She was the only outlet for his imagination. He had not much of that faculty to be sure, but there was in it the force of concentration. He felt outraged, and perhaps it was an absurdity on his part, but I venture to suggest rather in degree than in kind. I have a notion that no usual, normal father is pleased at parting with his daughter. No. Not even when he rationally appreciates 'Jane being taken off his hands' or perhaps is able to exult at an excellent match. At bottom, quite deep down, down in the dark (in some cases only by digging), there is to be found a certain repugnance. . . . With mothers of course it is different. Women are more loyal, not to each other, but to their common femininity which they behold triumphant with a secret and proud satisfaction.

"The circumstances of that match added to Mr. Smith's indignation. And if he followed his daughter into that ship's cabin it was as if into a house of disgrace and only because he was still bewildered by the suddenness of the thing. His will, so long lying fallow,

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was overborne by her determination and by a vague fear of that regained liberty.

"You will be glad to hear that Anthony, though he did shirk the welcome on the quay, behaved admirably, with the simplicity of a man who has no small meannesses and makes no mean reservations. His eyes did not flinch and his tongue did not falter. He was, I have it on the best authority, admirable in his earnestness, in his sincerity and also in his restraint. He was perfect. Nevertheless the vital force of his unknown individuality addressing him so familiarly was enough to fluster Mr. Smith. Flora saw her father trembling in all his exiguous length, though he held himself stiffer than ever if that was possible. He muttered a little and at last managed to utter, not loud of course but very distinctly: 'I am here under protest,' the corners of his mouth sunk disparagingly, his eyes stony. 'I am here under protest. I have been locked up by a conspiracy. I——'

"He raised his hands to his forehead—his silk hat was on the table rim upwards; he had put it there with a despairing gesture as he came in—he raised his hands to his forehead. 'It seems to me unfair. I——' He broke off again. Anthony looked at Flora who stood by the side of her father.

"'Well, sir, you will soon get used to me. Surely you and she must have had enough of shore-people and

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their confounded half-and-half ways to last you both for a lifetime. A particularly merciful lot they are too. You ask Flora. I am alluding to my own sister, her best friend, and not a bad woman either as they go.'

"The captain of the *Ferndale* checked himself. 'Lucky thing I was there to step in. I want you to make yourself at home, and before long——'

"The faded stare of the Great de Barral silenced Anthony by its inexpressive fixity. He signalled with his eyes to Flora towards the door of the state-room fitted specially to receive Mr. Smith, the free man. She seized the free man's hat off the table and took him caressingly under the arm. 'Yes! This is home, come and see your room, papa!'

"Anthony himself threw open the door and Flora took care to shut it carefully behind herself and her father.

"'See,' she began but desisted because it was clear that he would look at none of the contrivances for his comfort. She herself had hardly seen them before. He was looking only at the new carpet and she waited till he should raise his eyes.

"He didn't do that but spoke in his usual voice. 'So this is your husband, that . . . And I locked up!'

"'Papa, what's the good of harping on that,' she remonstrated no louder. 'He is kind.'

"'And you went and . . . married him so that he

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should be kind to me. Is that it? How did you know that I wanted anybody to be kind to me?'

"'How strange you are!' she said thoughtfully.

"'It's hard for a man who has gone through what I have gone through to feel like other people. Has that occurred to you? . . .' He looked up at last. . . . 'Mrs. Anthony. I can't bear the sight of the fellow.' She met his eyes without flinching and he added, 'You want to go to him now.' His mild automatic manner seemed the effect of tremendous self-restraint—and yet she remembered him always like that. She felt cold all over.

"'Why, of course, I must go to him,' she said with a slight start.

"He gnashed his teeth at her and she went out.

"Anthony had not moved from the spot. One of his hands was resting on the table. She went up to him, stopped, then deliberately moved still closer. 'Thank you, Roderick.'

"'You needn't thank me,' he murmured. 'It's I who . . .'

"'No, perhaps I needn't. You do what you like. But you are doing it well.'

"He sighed then hardly above a whisper because they were near the state-room door 'Upset, eh?'

"She made no sign, no sound of any kind. The thorough falseness of the position weighed on them both.

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But he was the braver of the two. 'I daresay. At first. Did you think of telling him you were happy?'

"'He never asked me,' she smiled faintly at him. She was disappointed by his quietness. 'I did not say more than I was absolutely obliged to say—of myself.' She was beginning to be irritated with this man a little. 'I told him I had been very lucky,' she said suddenly despondent, missing Anthony's masterful manner, that something arbitrary and tender which, after the first scare, she had accustomed herself to look forward to with pleasurable apprehension. He was contemplating her rather blankly. She had not taken off her outdoor things, hat, gloves. She was like a caller. And she had a movement suggesting the end of a not very satisfactory business call. 'Perhaps it would be just as well if we went ashore. Time yet.'

"He gave her a glimpse of his unconstrained self in the low vehement 'You dare!' which sprang to his lips and out of them with a most menacing inflexion.

"'You dare . . . What's the matter now?'

"These last words were shot out not at her but at some target behind her back. Looking over her shoulder she saw the bald head with black bunches of hair of the congested and devoted Franklin (he had his cap in his hand) gazing sentimentally from the saloon doorway with his lobster eyes. He was heard from the distance in a tone of injured innocence reporting that the berthing

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master was alongside and that he wanted to move the ship into the basin before the crew came on board.

"His captain growled 'Well, let him,' and waved away the ulcerated and pathetic soul behind these prominent eyes which lingered on the offensive woman while the mate backed out slowly. Anthony turned to Flora.

"'You could not have meant it. You are as straight as they make them.'

"'I am trying to be.'

"'Then don't joke in that way. Think of what would become of—me.'

"'Oh yes. I forgot. No, I didn't mean it. It wasn't a joke. It was forgetfulness. You wouldn't have been wronged. I couldn't have gone. I—I am too tired.'

"He saw she was swaying where she stood and restrained himself violently from taking her into his arms, his frame trembling with fear as though he had been tempted to an act of unparalleled treachery. He stepped aside and lowering his eyes pointed to the door of the stern-cabin. It was only after she passed by him that he looked up and thus he did not see the angry glance she gave him before she moved on. He looked after her. She tottered slightly just before reaching the door and flung it to behind her nervously.

"Anthony—he had felt this crash as if the door had

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been slammed inside his very breast—stood for a moment without moving and then shouted for Mrs. Brown. This was the steward's wife, his lucky inspiration to make Flora comfortable. 'Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown!' At last she appeared from somewhere. 'Mrs. Anthony has come on board. Just gone into the cabin. Hadn't you better see if you can be of any assistance?"

"'Yes, sir."

"And again he was alone with the situation he had created in the hardihood and inexperience of his heart. He thought he had better go on deck. In fact he ought to have been there before. At any rate it would be the usual thing for him to be on deck. But a sound of muttering and of faint thuds somewhere near by arrested his attention. They proceeded from Mr. Smith's room, he perceived. It was very extraordinary. 'He's talking to himself,' he thought. 'He seems to be thumping the bulkhead with his fists—or his head.'

"Anthony's eyes grew big with wonder while he listened to these noises. He became so attentive that he did not notice Mrs. Brown till she actually stopped before him for a moment to say:

"'Mrs. Anthony doesn't want any assistance, sir.'

"This was you understand the voyage before Mr. Powell—young Powell then—joined the *Ferndale;* chance having arranged that he should get his start in life in

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that particular ship of all the ships then in the port of London. The most unrestful ship that ever sailed out of any port on earth. I am not alluding to her sea-going qualities. Mr. Powell tells me she was as steady as a church. I mean unrestful in the sense, for instance, in which this planet of ours is unrestful—a matter of an uneasy atmosphere disturbed by passions, jealousies, loves, hates and the troubles of transcendental good intentions, which, though ethically valuable, I have no doubt cause often more unhappiness than the plots of the most evil tendency. For those who refuse to believe in chance he, I mean Mr. Powell, must have been obviously predestined to add his native ingenuousness to the sum of all the others carried by the honest ship *Ferndale*. He was too ingenuous. Everybody on board was, exception being made of 'Mr. Smith' who, however, was simple enough in his way, with that terrible simplicity of the fixed idea, for which there is also another name men pronounce with dread and aversion. His fixed idea was to save his girl from the man who had possessed himself of her (I use these words on purpose because the image they suggest was clearly in Mr. Smith's mind) possessed himself unfairly of her while he, the father, was locked up.

"'I won't rest till I have got you away from that man,' he would murmur to her after long periods of contemplation. We know from Powell how he used to

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sit on the skylight near the long deck chair on which Flora was reclining, gazing into her face from above with an air of guardianship and investigation at the same time.

"It is almost impossible to say if he ever had considered the event rationally. The avatar of de Barral into Mr. Smith had not been effected without a shock —that much one must recognise. It may be that it drove all practical considerations out of his mind, making room for awful and precise visions which nothing could dislodge afterwards. And it might have been the tenacity, the unintelligent tenacity, of the man who had persisted in throwing millions of other people's thrift into the Lone Valley Railway, the Labrador Docks, the Spotted Leopard Copper Mine, and other grotesque speculations exposed during the famous de Barral trial, amongst murmurs of astonishment mingled with bursts of laughter. For it is in the Courts of Law that Comedy finds its last refuge in our deadly serious world. As to tears and lamentations, these were not heard in the august precincts of comedy, because they were indulged in privately in several thousand homes, where, with a fine dramatic effect, hunger had taken the place of Thrift.

"But there was one at least who did not laugh in court. That person was the accused. The notorious de Barral did not laugh because he was indignant. He was impervious to words, to facts, to inferences. It

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would have been impossible to make him see his guilt or his folly—either by evidence or argument—if anybody had tried to argue.

"Neither did his daughter Flora try to argue with him. The cruelty of her position was so great, its complications so thorny, if I may express myself so, that a passive attitude was yet her best refuge—as it had been before her of so many women.

"For that sort of inertia in woman is always enigmatic and therefore menacing. It makes one pause. A woman may be a fool, a sleepy fool, an agitated fool, a too awfully noxious fool, and she may even be simply stupid. But she is never dense. She's never made of wood through and through as some men are. There is in woman always, somewhere, a spring. Whatever men don't know about women (and it may be a lot or it may be very little) men and even fathers do know that much. And that is why so many men are afraid of them.

"'Mr. Smith,' I believe was afraid of his daughter's quietness though of course he interpreted it in his own way.

"He would, as Mr. Powell depicts, sit on the skylight and bend over the reclining girl, wondering what there was behind the lost gaze under the darkened eyelids in the still eyes. He would look and look and then he would say, whisper rather, it didn't take much

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for his voice to drop to a mere breath—he would declare, transferring his faded stare to the horizon, that he would never rest till he had 'got her away from that man.'

"'You don't know what you are saying, papa.'

"She would try not to show her weariness, the nervous strain of these two men's antagonism around her person which was the cause of her languid attitudes. For as a matter of fact the sea agreed with her.

"As likely as not Anthony would be walking on the other side of the deck. The strain was making him restless. He couldn't sit still anywhere. He had tried shutting himself up in his cabin; but that was no good. He would jump up to rush on deck and tramp, tramp up and down that poop till he felt ready to drop, without being able to wear down the agitation of his soul, generous indeed, but weighted by its envelope of blood and muscle and bone; handicapped by the brain creating precise images and everlastingly speculating, speculating — looking out for signs, watching for symptoms.

"And Mr. Smith with a slight backward jerk of his small head at the footsteps on the other side of the skylight would insist in his awful, hopelessly gentle voice that he knew very well what he was saying. Hadn't she given herself to that man while he was locked up.

"'Helpless, in jail, with no one to think of, nothing

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to look forward to, but my daughter. And then when they let me out at last I find her gone—for it amounts to this. Sold. Because you've sold yourself; you know you have.'

"With his round unmoved face, a lot of fine white hair waving in the wind-eddies of the spanker, his glance levelled over the sea he seemed to be addressing the universe across her reclining form. She would protest sometimes.

"'I wish you would not talk like this, papa. You are only tormenting me, and tormenting yourself.'

"'Yes, I am tormented enough,' he admitted meaningly. But it was not talking about it that tormented him. It was thinking of it. And to sit and look at it was worse for him than it possibly could have been for her to go and give herself up, bad as that must have been.

"'For of course you suffered. Don't tell me you didn't? You must have.'

"She had renounced very soon all attempts at protests. It was useless. It might have made things worse; and she did not want to quarrel with her father, the only human being that really cared for her, absolutely, evidently, completely—to the end. There was in him no pity, no generosity, nothing whatever of these fine things—it was for *her,* for her very own self such as it was, that this human being cared. This certitude

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would have made her put up with worse torments. For, of course, she too was being tormented. She felt also helpless, as if the whole enterprise had been too much for her. This is the sort of conviction which makes for quietude. She was becoming a fatalist.

"What must have been rather appalling were the necessities of daily life, the intercourse of current trifles. That naturally had to go on. They wished good morning to each other, they sat down together to meals—and I believe there would be a game of cards now and then in the evening, especially at first. What frightened her most was the duplicity of her father, at least what looked like duplicity, when she remembered his persistent, insistent whispers on deck. However her father was a taciturn person as far back as she could remember him best—on the Parade. It was she who chattered, never troubling herself to discover whether he was pleased or displeased. And now she couldn't fathom his thoughts. Neither did she chatter to him. Anthony with a forced friendly smile as if frozen to his lips seemed only too thankful at not being made to speak. 'Mr. Smith' sometimes forgot himself while studying his hand so long that Flora had to recall him to himself by a murmured 'Papa—your lead.' Then he apologised by a faint as if inward ejaculation 'Beg your pardon, Captain.' Naturally she addressed Anthony as Roderick and he addressed her as Flora. This was all the acting that

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was necessary to judge from the wincing twitch of the old man's mouth at every uttered 'Flora.' On hearing the rare 'Rodericks' he had sometimes a scornful grimace as faint and faded and colourless as his whole stiff personality.

"He would be the first to retire. He was not infirm. With him too the life on board ship seemed to agree; but from a sense of duty, of affection, or to placate his hidden fury, his daughter always accompanied him to his state-room 'to make him comfortable.' She lighted his lamp, helped him into his dressing-gown or got him a book from a bookcase fitted in there—but this last rarely, because Mr. Smith used to declare 'I am no reader' with something like pride in his low tones. Very often after kissing her good night on the forehead he would treat her to some such fretful remark: 'It's like being in jail—'pon my word. I suppose "that man" is out there waiting for you. Head jailer! Ough!'

"She would smile vaguely; murmur a conciliatory 'How absurd.' But once, out of patience, she said quite sharply 'Leave off. It hurts me. One would think you hate me.'

"'It isn't you I hate,' he went on monotonously breathing at her. 'No, it isn't you. But if I saw that you loved that man I think I could hate you too.'

"That word struck straight at her heart. 'You wouldn't be the first then,' she muttered bitterly. But

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he was busy with his fixed idea and uttered an awfully equable 'But you don't! Unfortunate girl!'

"She looked at him steadily for a time then said:

"'Good night, papa.'

"As a matter of fact Anthony very seldom waited for her alone at the table with the scattered cards, glasses, water-jug, bottles and so on. He took no more opportunities to be alone with her than was absolutely necessary for the edification of Mrs. Brown. Excellent, faithful woman; the wife of his still more excellent and faithful steward. And Flora wished all these excellent people, devoted to Anthony, she wished them all farther; and especially the nice, pleasant-spoken Mrs. Brown with her beady, mobile eyes and her 'Yes certainly, ma'am,' which seemed to her to have a mocking sound. And so this short trip—to the Western Islands only—came to an end. It was so short that when young Powell joined the *Ferndale* by a memorable stroke of chance, no more than seven months had elapsed since the — let us say the liberation of the convict de Barral and his avatar into Mr. Smith.

"For the time the ship was loading in London Anthony took a cottage near a little country station in Essex, to house Mr. Smith and Mr. Smith's daughter. It was altogether his idea. How far it was necessary

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for Mr. Smith to seek rural retreat I don't know. Perhaps to some extent it was a judicious arrangement. There were some obligations incumbent on the liberated de Barral (in connection with reporting himself to the police I imagine) which Mr. Smith was not anxious to perform. De Barral had to vanish; the theory was that de Barral had vanished, and it had to be upheld. Poor Flora liked the country, even if the spot had nothing more to recommend it than its retired character.

"Now and then Captain Anthony ran down; but as the station was a real wayside one, with no early morning trains up, he could never stay for more than the afternoon. It appeared that he must sleep in town so as to be early on board his ship. The weather was magnificent and whenever the captain of the *Ferndale* was seen on a brilliant afternoon coming down the road Mr. Smith would seize his stick and toddle off for a solitary walk. But whether he would get tired or because it gave him some satisfaction to see 'that man' go away—or for some cunning reason of his own, he was always back before the hour of Anthony's departure. On approaching the cottage he would see generally 'that man' lying on the grass in the orchard at some distance from his daughter seated in a chair brought out of the cottage's living-room. Invariably Mr. Smith made straight for them and as invariably

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had the feeling that his approach was not disturbing a very intimate conversation. He sat with them, through a silent hour or so, and then it would be time for Anthony to go. Mr. Smith, perhaps from discretion, would casually vanish a minute or so before, and then watch through the diamond panes of an upstairs room 'that man' take a lingering look outside the gate at the invisible Flora, lift his hat, like a caller, and go off down the road. Then only Mr. Smith would join his daughter again.

"These were the bad moments for her. Not always, of course, but frequently. It was nothing extraordinary to hear Mr. Smith begin gently with some observation like this.

"'That man is getting tired of you.'

"He would never pronounce Anthony's name. It was always 'that man.'

"Generally she would remain mute with wide open eyes gazing at nothing between the gnarled fruit-trees. Once, however, she got up and walked into the cottage. Mr. Smith followed her carrying the chair. He banged it down resolutely and in that smooth inexpressive tone so many ears used to bend eagerly to catch when it came from the Great de Barral he said:

"'Let's get away.'

"She had the strength of mind not to spin round. On the contrary she went on to a shabby bit of a

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mirror on the wall. In the greenish glass her own face looked far off like the livid face of a drowned corpse at the bottom of a pool. She laughed faintly.

"'I tell you that man's getting——'

"'Papa,' she interrupted him. 'I have no illusions as to myself. It has happened to me before, but——'

"Her voice failing her suddenly her father struck in with quite an unwonted animation. 'Let's make a rush for it, then.'

"Having mastered both her fright and her bitterness, she turned round, sat down and allowed her astonishment to be seen. Mr. Smith sat down too, his knees together and bent at right angles, his thin legs parallel to each other and his hands resting on the arms of the wooden armchair. His hair had grown long, his head was set stiffly, there was something fatuously venerable in his aspect.

"'You can't care for him. Don't tell me. I understand your motive. And I have called you an unfortunate girl. You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets. Yes. Don't interrupt me, Flora. I was everlastingly being interrupted at the trial and I can't stand it any more. I won't be interrupted by my own child. And when I think that it is on the very day before they let me out that you . . .'

"He had wormed this fact out of her by that time

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because Flora had got tired of evading the question. He had been very much struck and distressed. Was that the trust she had in him? Was that a proof of confidence and love? The very day before! Never given him even half a chance. It was as at the trial. They never gave him a chance. They would not give him time. And there was his own daughter acting exactly as his bitterest enemies had done. Not giving him time!

"The monotony of that subdued voice nearly lulled her dismay to sleep. She listened to the unavoidable things he was saying.

"'But what induced that man to marry you? Of course he's a gentleman. One can see that. And that makes it worse. Gentlemen don't understand anything about city affairs—finance. Why!—the people who started the cry after me were a firm of gentlemen. The counsel, the judge—all gentlemen—quite out of it! No notion of . . . And then he's a sailor too. Just a skipper——'

"'My grandfather was nothing else,' she interrupted. And he made an angular gesture of impatience.

"'Yes. But what does a silly sailor know of business? Nothing. No conception. He could have had no idea of what it means to be the daughter of Mr. de Barral — even after his enemies had smashed him. What on earth induced him——'

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"She made a movement because the level voice was getting on her nerves. And he paused, but only to go on again in the same tone with the remark:

"'Of course you are pretty. And that's why you are lost—like many other poor girls. Unfortunate is the word for you.'

"She said: 'It may be. Perhaps it is the right word; but listen, papa. I mean to be honest.'

"He began to exhale more speeches.

"'Just the sort of man to get tired and then leave you and go off with his beastly ship. And anyway you can never be happy with him. Look at his eyes. I want to save you. You see I was not perhaps a very good husband to your poor mother. She would have done better to have left me long before she died. I have been thinking it all over. I won't have you unhappy.'

"He ran his eyes over her with an attention which was surprisingly noticeable. Then said, 'H'm! Yes. Let's clear out before it is too late. Quietly, you and I.'

"She said as if inspired and with that calmness which despair often gives: 'There is no money to go away with, papa.'

"He rose up straightening himself as though he were a hinged figure. She said decisively:

"'And of course you wouldn't think of deserting me, papa?'

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"'Of course not,' sounded his subdued tone. And he left her, gliding away with his walk which Mr. Powell described to me as being as level and wary as his voice. He walked as if he were carrying a glass full of water on his head.

"Flora naturally said nothing to Anthony of that edifying conversation. His generosity might have taken alarm at it and she did not want to be left behind to manage her father alone. And moreover she was too honest. She would be honest at whatever cost. She would not be the first to speak. Never. And the thought came into her head: 'I am indeed an unfortunate creature!'

"It was by the merest coincidence that Anthony coming for the afternoon two days later had a talk with Mr. Smith in the orchard. Flora for some reason or other had left them for a moment; and Anthony took that opportunity to be frank with Mr. Smith. He said: 'It seems to me, sir, that you think Flora has not done very well for herself. Well, as to that I can't say anything. All I want you to know is that I have tried to do the right thing.' And then he explained that he had willed everything he was possessed of to her. 'She didn't tell you, I suppose?'

"Mr. Smith shook his head slightly. And Anthony, trying to be friendly, was just saying that he proposed to keep the ship away from home for at least two

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years: 'I think, sir, that from every point of view it would be best,' when Flora came back and the conversation, cut short in that direction, languished and died. Later in the evening, after Anthony had been gone for hours, on the point of separating for the night, Mr. Smith remarked suddenly to his daughter after a long period of brooding:

"'A will is nothing. One tears it up. One makes another.' Then after reflecting for a minute he added unemotionally:

"'One tells lies about it.'

"Flora, patient, steeled against every hurt and every disgust to the point of wondering at herself, said: 'You push your dislike of—of—Roderick too far, papa. You have no regard for me. You hurt me.'

"He, as ever inexpressive to the point of terrifying her sometimes by the contrast of his placidity and his words, turned away from her a pair of faded eyes.

"'I wonder how far *your* dislike goes,' he began. 'His very name sticks in your throat. I've noticed it. It hurts me. What do you think of that? You might remember that you are not the only person that's hurt by your folly, by your hastiness, by your recklessness.' He brought back his eyes to her face. 'And the very day before they were going to let me out.' His feeble voice failed him altogether, the narrow compressed lips

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only trembling for a time before he added with that extraordinary equanimity of tone, 'I call it sinful.'

"Flora made no answer. She judged it simpler, kinder and certainly safer to let him talk himself out. This, Mr. Smith, being naturally taciturn, never took very long to do. And we must not imagine that this sort of thing went on all the time. She had a few good days in that cottage. The absence of Anthony was a relief and his visits were pleasurable. She was quieter. He was quieter too. She was almost sorry when the time to join the ship arrived. It was a moment of anguish, of excitement; they arrived at the dock in the evening and Flora after 'making her father comfortable' according to established usage lingered in the state-room long enough to notice that he was surprised. She caught his pale eyes observing her quite stonily. Then she went out after a cheery good night.

"Contrary to her hopes she found Anthony yet in the saloon. Sitting in his armchair at the head of the table he was picking up some business papers which he put hastily in his breast pocket and got up. He asked her if her day, travelling up to town and then doing some shopping, had tired her. She shook her head. Then he wanted to know in a half-jocular way how she felt about going away, and for a long voyage this time.

"'Does it matter how I feel?' she asked in a tone

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that cast a gloom over his face. He answered with repressed violence which she did not expect:

"'No, it does not matter, because I cannot go without you. I've told you. . . . You know it. You don't think I could.'

"'I assure you I haven't the slightest wish to evade my obligations,' she said steadily. 'Even if I could. Even if I dared, even if I had to die for it!'

"He looked thunder-struck. They stood facing each other at the end of the saloon. Anthony stuttered. 'Oh, no. You won't die. You don't mean it. You have taken kindly to the sea.'

"She laughed, but she felt angry.

"'No, I don't mean it. I tell you I don't mean to evade my obligations. I shall live on . . . feeling a little crushed, nevertheless.'

"'Crushed!' he repeated. 'What's crushing you?'

"'Your magnanimity,' she said sharply. But her voice was softened after a time. 'Yet I don't know. There is a perfection in it—do you understand me, Roderick? which makes it almost possible to bear.'

"He sighed, looked away, and remarked that it was time to put out the lamp in the saloon. The permission was only till ten o'clock.

"'But you needn't mind that so much in your cabin. Just see that the curtains of the ports are drawn close and that's all. The steward might have

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forgotten to do it. He lighted your reading-lamp in there before he went home for a last evening with his wife. I don't know if it was wise to get rid of Mrs. Brown. You will have to look after yourself, Flora.'

"He was quite anxious; but Flora as a matter of fact congratulated herself on the absence of Mrs. Brown. No sooner had she closed the door of her state-room than she murmured fervently, 'Yes! Thank goodness, she is gone.' There would be no gentle knock, followed by her appearance with her equivocal stare and the intolerable: 'Can I do anything for you, ma'am?' which poor Flora had learned to fear and hate more than any voice or any words on board that ship—her only refuge from the world which had no use for her, for her imperfections and for her troubles.

"Mrs. Brown had been very much vexed at her dismissal. The Browns were a childless couple and the arrangement had suited them perfectly. Their resentment was very bitter. Mrs. Brown had to remain ashore alone with her rage, but the steward was nursing his on board. Poor Flora had no greater enemy, the aggrieved mate had no greater sympathiser. And Mrs. Brown, with a woman's quick power of observation and inference (the putting of two and two together) had come to a certain conclusion which she had imparted to her husband before leaving the ship. The morose

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steward permitted himself once to make an allusion to it in Powell's hearing. It was in the officers' mess-room at the end of a meal while he lingered after putting a fruit pie on the table. He and the chief-mate started a dialogue about the alarming change in the Captain, the sallow steward looking down with a sinister frown, Franklin rolling upwards his eyes, sentimental in a red face. Young Powell had heard a lot of that sort of thing by that time. It was growing monotonous; it had always sounded to him a little absurd. He struck in impatiently with the remark that such lamentations over a man merely because he had taken a wife seemed to him like lunacy.

"Franklin muttered, 'Depends on what the wife is up to.' The steward leaning against the bulkhead near the door glowered at Powell, that new-comer, that ignoramus, that stranger without right or privileges. He snarled:

"'Wife! Call her a wife, do you?'

"'What the devil do you mean by this?' exclaimed young Powell.

"'I know what I know. My old woman has not been six months on board for nothing. You had better ask her when we get back.'

"And meeting sullenly the withering stare of Mr. Powell the steward retreated backwards.

"Our young friend turned at once upon the mate,

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'And you let that confounded bottle-washer talk like this before you, Mr. Franklin. Well, I am astonished.'

"'Oh, it isn't what you think. It isn't what you think.' Mr. Franklin looked more apoplectic than ever. 'If it comes to that I *could* astonish you. But it's no use. I myself can hardly . . . You couldn't understand. I hope you won't try to make mischief. There was a time, young fellow, when I would have dared any man —any man, you hear?—to make mischief between me and Captain Anthony. But not now. Not now. There's a change! Not in me though . . .'

"Young Powell rejected with indignation any suggestion of making mischief. 'Who do you take me for?' he cried. 'Only you had better tell that steward to be careful what he says before me or I'll spoil his good looks for him for a month and will leave him to explain the why of it to the Captain the best way he can.'

"This speech established Powell in a way as a champion of Mrs. Anthony. Nothing more bearing on the question was ever said before him. He did not care for the steward's black looks; Franklin, never conversational even at the best of times and avoiding now the only topic near his heart, addressed him only on matters of duty. And for that, too, Powell cared very little. The woes of the apoplectic mate had begun

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to bore him long before. Yet he felt lonely a bit at times. Therefore the little intercourse with Mrs. Anthony either in one dog-watch or the other was something to be looked forward to. The Captain did not mind it. That was evident from his manner. One night he enquired (they were then alone on the poop) what they had been talking about that evening? Powell had to confess that it was about the ship. Mrs. Anthony had been asking him questions.

"'Takes interest—eh?' jerked out the Captain moving rapidly up and down the weather side of the poop.

"'Yes, sir. Mrs. Anthony seems to get hold wonderfully of what one's telling her.'

"'Sailor's granddaughter. One of the old school. Old sea-dog of the best kind, I believe,' ejaculated the Captain, swinging past his motionless second officer and leaving the words behind him like a trail of sparks succeeded by a perfect conversational darkness, because, for the next two hours till he left the deck, he didn't open his lips again.

"On another occasion . . . we mustn't forget that the ship had crossed the line and was adding up south latitude every day by then . . . on another occasion, about seven in the evening, Powell on duty, heard his name uttered softly in the companion. The Captain

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was on the stairs, thin-faced, his eyes sunk, on his arm a Shetland wool wrap.

"'Mr. Powell—here.'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Give this to Mrs. Anthony. Evenings are getting chilly.'

"And the haggard face sank out of sight. Mrs. Anthony was surprised on seeing the shawl.

"'The Captain wants you to put this on,' explained young Powell, and as she raised herself in her seat he dropped it on her shoulders. She wrapped herself up closely.

"'Where was the Captain?' she asked.

"'He was in the companion. Called me on purpose,' said Powell, and then retreated discreetly, because she looked as though she didn't want to talk any more that evening. Mr. Smith—the old gentleman—was as usual sitting on the skylight near her head, brooding over the long chair but by no means inimical, as far as his unreadable face went, to those conversations of the two youngest people on board. In fact they seemed to give him some pleasure. Now and then he would raise his faded china eyes to the animated face of Mr. Powell thoughtfully. When the young sailor was by, the old man became less rigid, and when his daughter, on rare occasions, smiled at some artless tale of Mr. Powell, the inexpressive face of 'Mr. Smith' reflected

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dimly that flash of evanescent mirth. For Mr. Powell had come now to entertain his Captain's wife with anecdotes from the not very distant past when he was a boy, on board various ships,—funny things do happen on board ship. Flora was quite surprised at times to find herself amused. She was even heard to laugh twice in the course of a month. It was not a loud sound but it was startling enough at the after-end of the *Ferndale* where low tones or silence were the rule. The second time this happened the Captain himself must have been startled somewhere down below; because he emerged from the depths of his unobtrusive existence and began his tramping on the opposite side of the poop.

"Almost immediately he called his young second officer over to him. This was not done in displeasure. The glance he fastened on Mr. Powell conveyed a sort of approving wonder. He engaged him in desultory conversation as if for the only purpose of keeping a man who could provoke such a sound, near his person. Mr. Powell felt himself liked. He felt it. Liked by that haggard, restless man who threw at him disconnected phrases to which his answers were, 'Yes, sir,' 'No, sir,' 'Oh, certainly,' 'I suppose so, sir,'—and might have been clearly anything else for all the other cared.

"It was then, Mr. Powell told me, that he dis-

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covered in himself an already old-established liking for Captain Anthony. He also felt sorry for him without being able to discover the origins of that sympathy of which he had become so suddenly aware.

"Meantime 'Mr. Smith,' bending forward stiffly as though he had a hinged back, was speaking to his daughter.

"She was a child no longer. He wanted to know if she believed in—in hell. In eternal punishment?

"His peculiar voice, as if filtered through cotton-wool, was inaudible on the other side of the deck. Poor Flora, taken very much unawares, made an inarticulate murmur, shook her head vaguely, and glanced in the direction of the pacing Anthony who was not looking her way. It was no use glancing in that direction. Of young Powell, leaning against the mizzen-mast and facing his Captain she could only see the shoulder and part of a blue serge back.

"And the unworried, unaccented voice of her father went on tormenting her.

"'You see, you must understand. When I came out of gaol it was with joy. That is, my soul was fairly torn in two—but anyway to see you happy—I had made up my mind to that. Once I could be sure that you were happy then of course I would have had no reason to care for life—strictly speaking—which is all right for an old man; though naturally . . . no

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reason to wish for death either. But this sort of life! What sense, what meaning, what value has it either for you or for me? It's just sitting down to look at the death, that's coming, coming. What else is it? I don't know how you can put up with that. I don't think you can stand it for long. Some day you will jump overboard.'

"Captain Anthony had stopped for a moment staring ahead from the break of the poop, and poor Flora sent at his back a look of despairing appeal which would have moved a heart of stone. But as though she had done nothing he did not stir in the least. She got out of the long chair and went towards the companion. Her father followed carrying a few small objects, a handbag, her handkerchief, a book. They went down together.

"It was only then that Captain Anthony turned, looked at the place they had vacated and resumed his tramping, but not his desultory conversation with his second officer His nervous exasperation had grown so much that now very often he used to lose control of his voice. If he did not watch himself it would suddenly die in his throat. He had to make sure before he ventured on the simplest saying, an order, a remark on the wind, a simple good morning. That's why his utterance was abrupt, his answers to people startlingly brusque and often not forthcoming at all.

"It happens to the most resolute of men to find

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himself at grips not only with unknown forces, but with a well-known force the real might of which he had not understood. Anthony had discovered that he was not the proud master but the chafing captive of his generosity. It rose in front of him like a wall which his respect for himself forbade him to scale. He said to himself: 'Yes, I was a fool—but she has trusted me!' Trusted! A terrible word to any man somewhat exceptional in a world in which success has never been found in renunciation and good faith. And it must also be said, in order not to make Anthony more stupidly sublime than he was, that the behaviour of Flora kept him at a distance. The girl was afraid to add to the exasperation of her father. It was her unhappy lot to be made more wretched by the only affection which she could not suspect. She could not be angry with it, however, and out of deference for that exaggerated sentiment she hardly dared to look otherwise than by stealth at the man whose masterful compassion had carried her off. And quite unable to understand the extent of Anthony's delicacy, she said to herself that 'he didn't care.' He probably was beginning at bottom to detest her—like the governess, like the maiden lady, like the German woman, like Mrs. Fyne, like Mr. Fyne —only he was extraordinary, he was generous. At the same time she had moments of irritation. He was violent, headstrong—perhaps stupid. Well, he had had his way.

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"A man who has had his way is seldom happy, for generally he finds that the way does not lead very far on this earth of desires which can never be fully satisfied. Anthony had entered with extreme precipitation the enchanted gardens of Armida saying to himself 'At last!' As to Armida, herself, he was not going to offer her any violence. But now he had discovered that all the enchantment was in Armida herself, in Armida's smiles. This Armida did not smile. She existed, unapproachable, behind the blank wall of his renunciation. His force, fit for action, experienced the impatience, the indignation, almost the despair of his vitality arrested, bound, stilled, progressively worn down, frittered away by Time; by that force blind and insensible, which seems inert and yet uses one's life up by its imperceptible action, dropping minute after minute on one's living heart like drops of water wearing down a stone.

"He upbraided himself. What else could he have expected? He had rushed in like a ruffian; he had dragged the poor defenceless thing by the hair of her head, as it were, on board that ship. It was really atrocious. Nothing assured him that his person could be attractive to this or any other woman. And his proceedings were enough in themselves to make anyone odious. He must have been bereft of his senses. She must fatally detest and fear him. Nothing could make up for such brutality. And yet somehow he resented

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this very attitude which seemed to him completely justifiable. Surely he was not too monstrous (morally) to be looked at frankly sometimes. But no! She wouldn't. Well, perhaps, some day . . . Only he was not going ever to attempt to beg for forgiveness. With the repulsion she felt for his person she would certainly misunderstand the most guarded words, the most careful advances. Never! Never!

"It would occur to Anthony at the end of such meditations that death was not an unfriendly visitor after all. No wonder then that even young Powell, his faculties having been put on the alert, began to think that there was something unusual about the man who had given him his chance in life. Yes, decidedly, his Captain was 'strange.' There was something wrong somewhere, he said to himself, never guessing that his young and candid eyes were in the presence of a passion profound, tyrannical and mortal, discovering its own existence, astounded at feeling itself helpless and dismayed at finding itself incurable.

"Powell had never before felt this mysterious uneasiness so strongly as on that evening when it had been his good fortune to make Mrs. Anthony laugh a little by his artless prattle. Standing out of the way, he had watched his Captain walk the weather-side of the poop, he took full cognisance of his liking for that inexplicably strange man and saw him swerve towards the com-

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panion and go down below with sympathetic if utterly uncomprehending eyes.

"Shortly afterwards Mr. Smith came up alone and manifested a desire for a little conversation. He, too, if not so mysterious as the Captain, was not very comprehensible to Mr. Powell's uninformed candour. He often favoured thus the second officer. His talk alluded somewhat enigmatically and often without visible connection to Mr. Powell's friendliness towards himself and his daughter. 'For I am well aware that we have no friends on board this ship, my dear young man,' he would add, 'except yourself. Flora feels that too.'

"And Mr. Powell, flattered and embarrassed, could but emit a vague murmur of protest. For the statement was true in a sense, though the fact was in itself insignificant. The feelings of the ship's company could not possibly matter to the Captain's wife and to Mr. Smith—her father. Why the latter should so often allude to it was what surprised our Mr. Powell. This was by no means the first occasion. More like the twentieth rather. And in his weak voice, with his monotonous intonation, leaning over the rail and looking at the water the other continued this conversation, or rather his remarks, remarks of such a monstrous nature that Mr. Powell had no option but to accept them for gruesome jesting.

"'For instance,' said Mr. Smith, 'that mate, Franklin,

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I believe he would just as soon see us both overboard as not.'

"'It's not so bad as that,' laughed Mr. Powell, feeling uncomfortable, because his mind did not accommodate itself easily to exaggeration of statement. 'He isn't a bad chap really,' he added, very conscious of Mr. Franklin's offensive manner of which instances were not far to seek. 'He's such a fool as to be jealous. He has been with the Captain for years. It's not for me to say, perhaps, but I think the Captain has spoiled all that gang of old servants. They are like a lot of pet old dogs. Wouldn't let anybody come near him if they could help it. I've never seen anything like it. And the second mate, I believe, was like that too.'

"'Well, he isn't here, luckily. There would have been one more enemy,' said Mr. Smith. 'There's enough of them without him. And you being here instead of him makes it much more pleasant for my daughter and myself. One feels there may be a friend in need. For really, for a woman all alone on board ship amongst a lot of unfriendly men. . .'

"'But Mrs. Anthony is not alone,' exclaimed Powell. 'There's you, and there's the . . .'

"Mr. Smith interrupted him.

"'Nobody's immortal. And there are times when one feels ashamed to live. Such an evening as this for instance.'

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"It was a lovely evening; the colours of a splendid sunset had died out and the breath of a warm breeze seemed to have smoothed out the sea. Away to the south the sheet lightning was like the flashing of an enormous lantern hidden under the horizon. In order to change the conversation Mr. Powell said:

"'Anyway no one can charge you with being a Jonah, Mr. Smith. We have had a magnificent quick passage so far. The Captain ought to be pleased. And I suppose you are not sorry either.'

"This diversion was not successful. Mr. Smith emitted a sort of bitter chuckle and said: 'Jonah! That's the fellow that was thrown overboard by some sailors. It seems to me it's very easy at sea to get rid of a person one does not like. The sea does not give up its dead as the earth does.'

"'You forget the whale, sir,' said young Powell.

"Mr. Smith gave a start. 'Eh? What whale? Oh! Jonah. I wasn't thinking of Jonah. I was thinking of this passage which seems so quick to you. But only think what it is to me? It isn't a life going about the sea like this. And, for instance, if one were to fall ill, there isn't a doctor to find out what's the matter with one. It's worrying. It makes me anxious at times.'

"'Is Mrs. Anthony not feeling well?' asked Powell. But Mr. Smith's remark was not meant for Mrs. Anthony. She was well. He himself was well. It was the

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Captain's health that did not seem quite satisfactory. Had Mr. Powell noticed his appearance?

"Mr. Powell didn't know enough of the Captain to judge. He couldn't tell. But he observed thoughtfully that Mr. Franklin had been saying the same thing. And Franklin had known the Captain for years. The mate was quite worried about it.

"This intelligence startled Mr. Smith considerably. 'Does he think he is in danger of dying?' he exclaimed with an animation quite extraordinary for him, which horrified Mr. Powell.

"'Heavens! Die! No! Don't you alarm yourself, sir. I've never heard a word about danger from Mr. Franklin.'

"'Well, well,' sighed Mr. Smith and left the poop for the saloon rather abruptly.

"As a matter of fact Mr. Franklin had been on deck for some considerable time. He had come to relieve young Powell; but seeing him engaged in talk with the 'enemy'—with one of the 'enemies' at least—had kept at a distance, which, the poop of the *Ferndale* being over seventy feet long, he had no difficulty in doing. Mr. Powell saw him at the head of the ladder leaning on his elbow, melancholy and silent. 'Oh! Here you are, sir.'

"'Here I am. Here I've been ever since six o'clock. Didn't want to interrupt the pleasant conversation. If

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you like to put in half of your watch below jawing with a dear friend, that's not my affair. Funny taste though.'

"'He isn't a bad chap,' said the impartial Powell.

"The mate snorted angrily, tapping the deck with his foot; then: 'Isn't he? Well, give him my love when you come together again for another nice long yarn.'

"'I say, Mr. Franklin, I wonder the Captain don't take offence at your manners.'

"'The Captain. I wish to goodness he would start a row with me. Then I should know at least I am somebody on board. I'd welcome it, Mr. Powell. I'd rejoice. And dam' me I would talk back too till I roused him. He's a shadow of himself. He walks about his ship like a ghost. He's fading away right before our eyes. But of course you don't see. You don't care a hang. Why should you?'

"Mr. Powell did not wait for more. He went down on the main deck. Without taking the mate's jeremiads seriously he put them beside the words of Mr. Smith. He had grown already attached to Captain Anthony. There was something not only attractive but compelling in the man. Only it is very difficult for youth to believe in the menace of death. Not in the fact itself, but in its proximity to a breathing, moving, talking, superior human being, showing no sign of disease. And Mr. Powell thought that this talk was all nonsense. But his curiosity was awakened. There was something, and at

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any time some circumstance might occur . . . No, he would never find out. . . . There was nothing to find out, most likely. Mr. Powell went to his room where he tried to read a book he had already read a good many times. Presently a bell rang for the officers' supper.

CHAPTER VI.

". . . A MOONLESS NIGHT, THICK WITH STARS ABOVE, VERY DARK ON THE WATER."

"In the mess-room Powell found Mr. Franklin hacking at a piece of cold salt-beef with a table-knife. The mate, fiery in the face and rolling his eyes over that task, explained that the carver belonging to the mess-room could not be found. The steward, present also, complained savagely of the cook. The fellow got things into his galley and then lost them. Mr. Franklin tried to pacify him with mournful firmness.

"'There, there! That will do. We who have been all these years together in the ship have other things to think about than quarrelling among ourselves.'

"Mr. Powell thought with exasperation: 'Here he goes again,' for this utterance had nothing cryptic for him. The steward having withdrawn morosely, he was not surprised to hear the mate strike the usual note.

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That morning the mizzen topsail tie had carried away (probably a defective link) and something like forty feet of chain and wire-rope, mixed up with a few heavy iron blocks, had crashed down from aloft on the poop with a terrifying racket.

"'Did you notice the Captain then, Mr. Powell. Did you notice?'

"Powell confessed frankly that he was too scared himself when all that lot of gear came down on deck to notice anything.

"'The gin-block missed his head by an inch,' went on the mate impressively. 'I wasn't three feet from him. And what did he do? Did he shout, or jump, or even look aloft to see if the yard wasn't coming down too about our ears in a dozen pieces? It's a marvel it didn't. No, he just stopped short—no wonder; he must have felt the wind of that iron gin-block on his face—looked down at it, there, lying close to his foot—and went on again. I believe he didn't even blink. It isn't natural. The man is stupefied.'

"He sighed ridiculously and Mr. Powell had suppressed a grin, when the mate added as if he couldn't contain himself:

"'He will be taking to drink next. Mark my words. That's the next thing.'

"Mr. Powell was disgusted.

"'You are so fond of the Captain and yet you don't

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seem to care what you say about him. I haven't been with him for seven years, but I know he isn't the sort of man that takes to drink. And then—why the devil should he?'

"'Why the devil, you ask. Devil—eh? Well, no man is safe from the devil—and that's answer enough for you,' wheezed Mr. Franklin not unkindly. 'There was a time, a long time ago, when I nearly took to drink myself. What do you say to that?'

"Mr. Powell expressed a polite incredulity. The thick, congested mate seemed on the point of bursting with despondency. 'That was bad example though. I was young and fell into dangerous company, made a fool of myself—yes, as true as you see me sitting here. Drank to forget. Thought it a great dodge.'

"Powell looked at the grotesque Franklin with awakened interest and with that half-amused sympathy with which we receive unprovoked confidences from men with whom we have no sort of affinity. And at the same time he began to look upon him more seriously. Experience has its prestige. And the mate continued:

"'If it hadn't been for the old lady, I should have gone to the devil. I remembered her in time. Nothing like having an old lady to look after to steady a chap and make him face things. But as bad luck would have it, Captain Anthony has no mother living, not a

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blessed soul belonging to him as far as I know. Oh, aye, I fancy he said once something to me of a sister. But she's married. She don't need him. Yes. In the old days he used to talk to me as if we had been brothers,' exaggerated the mate sentimentally. '"Franklin,"—he would say—"this ship is my nearest relation and she isn't likely to turn against me. And I suppose you are the man I've known the longest in the world." That's how he used to speak to me. Can I turn my back on him? He has turned his back on his ship; that's what it has come to. He has no one now but his old Franklin. But what's a fellow to do to put things back as they were and should be. Should be—I say!'

"His starting eyes had a terrible fixity. Mr. Powell's irresistible thought, 'he resembles a boiled lobster in distress,' was followed by annoyance. 'Good Lord,' he said, 'you don't mean to hint that Captain Anthony has fallen into bad company. What is it you want to save him from?'

"'I do mean it,' affirmed the mate, and the very absurdity of the statement made it impressive—because it seemed so absolutely audacious. 'Well, you have a cheek,' said young Powell, feeling mentally helpless. 'I have a notion the Captain would half kill you if he were to know how you carry on.'

"'And welcome,' uttered the fervently devoted

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Franklin. 'I am willing, if he would only clear the ship afterwards of that . . . You are but a youngster and you may go and tell him what you like. Let him knock the stuffing out of his old Franklin first and think it over afterwards. Anything to pull him together. But of course you wouldn't. You are all right. Only you don't know that things are sometimes different from what they look. There are friendships that are no friendships, and marriages that are no marriages. . . . Phoo! Likely to be right—wasn't it? Never a hint to me. I go off on leave and when I come back, there it is—all over, settled! Not a word beforehand. No warning. If only: "What do you think of it, Franklin?" —or anything of the sort. And that's a man who hardly ever did anything without asking my advice. Why! He couldn't take over a new coat from the tailor without . . . first thing, directly the fellow came on board with some new clothes, whether in London or in China, it would be: "Pass the word along there for Mr. Franklin. Mr. Franklin wanted in the cabin." In I would go. "Just look at my back, Franklin. Fits all right, doesn't it?" And I would say: "First rate, sir," or whatever was the truth of it. That or anything else. Always the truth of it. Always. And well he knew it; and that's why he dared not speak right out. Talking about workmen, alterations, cabins. . . . Phoo! . . . instead of a straightforward—"Wish me joy, Mr. Frank-

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lin!" Yes, that was the way to let me know. God only knows what they are—perhaps she isn't his daughter any more than she is . . . She doesn't resemble that old fellow. Not a bit. Not a bit. It's very awful. You may well open your mouth, young man. But for goodness sake, you who are mixed up with that lot, keep your eyes and ears open too in case—in case of . . . I don't know what. Anything. One wonders what can happen here at sea! Nothing. Yet when a man is called a jailer behind his back.'

"Mr. Franklin hid his face in his hands for a moment and Powell shut his mouth, which indeed had been open. He slipped out of the mess-room noiselessly. 'The mate's crazy,' he thought. It was his firm conviction. Nevertheless, that evening, he felt his inner tranquillity disturbed at last by the force and obstinacy of this craze. He couldn't dismiss it with the contempt it deserved. Had the word 'jailer' really been pronounced? A strange word for the mate to even *imagine* he had heard. A senseless, unlikely word. But this word being the only clear and definite statement in these grotesque and dismal ravings was comparatively restful to his mind. Powell's mind rested on it still when he came up at eight o'clock to take charge of the deck. It was a moonless night, thick with stars above, very dark on the water. A steady air from the west kept the sails asleep. Franklin mustered both watches

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in low tones as if for a funeral, then approaching Powell:

"'The course is east-south-east,' said the chief-mate distinctly.

"'East-south-east, sir.'

"'Everything's set, Mr. Powell.'

"'All right, sir."

"The other lingered, his sentimental eyes gleamed silvery in the shadowy face. 'A quiet night before us. I don't know that there are any special orders. A settled, quiet night. I daresay you won't see the Captain. Once upon a time this was the watch he used to come up and start a chat with either of us then on deck. But now he sits in that infernal stern-cabin and mopes. Jailer—eh?'

"Mr. Powell walked away from the mate and when at some distance said, 'Damn!' quite heartily. It was a confounded nuisance. It had ceased to be funny; that hostile word 'jailer,' had given the situation an air of reality.

"Franklin's grotesque mortal envelope had disappeared from the poop to seek its needful repose, if only the worried soul would let it rest awhile. Mr. Powell, half sorry for the thick little man, wondered whether it would let him. For himself, he recognised that the charm of a quiet watch on deck when one

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may let one's thoughts roam in space and time had been spoiled without remedy. What shocked him most was the implied aspersion of complicity on Mrs. Anthony. It angered him. In his own words to me, he felt very 'enthusiastic' about Mrs. Anthony. 'Enthusiastic' is good; especially as he couldn't exactly explain to me what he meant by it. But he felt enthusiastic, he says. That silly Franklin must have been dreaming. That was it. He had dreamed it all. Ass. Yet the injurious word stuck in Powell's mind with its associated ideas of prisoner, of escape. He became very uncomfortable. And just then (it might have been half-an-hour or more since he had relieved Franklin) just then Mr. Smith came up on the poop alone, like a gliding shadow and leaned over the rail by his side. Young Powell was affected disagreeably by his presence. He made a movement to go away but the other began to talk—and Powell remained where he was as if retained by a mysterious compulsion. The conversation started by Mr. Smith had nothing peculiar. He began to talk of mail-boats in general and in the end seemed anxious to discover what were the services from Port Elizabeth to London. Mr. Powell did not know for certain but imagined that there must be communication with England at least twice a month. 'Are you thinking of leaving us, sir; of going home by steam? Perhaps with Mrs. Anthony,' he asked anxiously.

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"'No! No! How can I?' Mr. Smith got quite agitated, for him, which did not amount to much. He was just asking for the sake of something to talk about. No idea at all of going home. One could not always do what one wanted and that's why there were moments when one felt ashamed to live. This did not mean that one did not want to live. Oh, no!

"He spoke with careless slowness, pausing frequently and in such a low voice that Powell had to strain his hearing to catch the phrases dropped overboard as it were. And indeed they seemed not worth the effort. It was like the aimless talk of a man pursuing a secret train of thought far removed from the idle words we so often utter only to keep in touch with our fellow beings. An hour passed. It seemed as though Mr. Smith could not make up his mind to go below. He repeated himself. Again he spoke of lives which one was ashamed of. It was necessary to put up with such lives as long as there was no way out, no possible issue. He even alluded once more to mail-boat services on the East coast of Africa and young Powell had to tell him once more that he knew nothing about them.

"'Every fortnight, I thought you said,' insisted Mr. Smith. He stirred, seemed to detach himself from the rail with difficulty. His long, slender figure straightened into stiffness, as if hostile to the enveloping soft peace of air and sea and sky, emitted into the night a weak

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murmur which Mr. Powell fancied was the word 'Abominable' repeated three times, but which passed into the faintly louder declaration: 'The moment has come—to go to bed,' followed by a just audible sigh.

"'I sleep very well,' added Mr. Smith in his restrained tone. 'But it is the moment one opens one's eyes that is horrible at sea. These days! Oh, these days! I wonder how anybody can . . .'

"'I like the life,' observed Mr. Powell.

"'Oh, you. You have only yourself to think of. You have made your bed. Well, it's very pleasant to feel that you are friendly to us. My daughter has taken quite a liking to you, Mr. Powell.'

"He murmured, 'Good night' and glided away rigidly. Young Powell asked himself with some distaste what was the meaning of these utterances. His mind had been worried at last into that questioning attitude by no other person than the grotesque Franklin. Suspicion was not natural to him. And he took good care to carefully separate in his thoughts Mrs. Anthony from this man of enigmatic words—her father. Presently he observed that the sheen of the two deck dead-lights of Mr. Smith's room had gone out. The old gentleman had been surprisingly quick in getting into bed. Shortly afterwards the lamp in the foremost skylight of the saloon was turned out; and this was the sign that the steward had taken in the tray and had retired for the night.

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"Young Powell had settled down to the regular officer-of-the-watch tramp in the dense shadow of the world decorated with stars high above his head, and on earth only a few gleams of light about the ship. The lamp in the after skylight was kept burning through the night. There were also the dead-lights of the stern-cabins glimmering dully in the deck far aft, catching his eye when he turned to walk that way. The brasses of the wheel glittered too, with the dimly lit figure of the man detached, as if phosphorescent, against the black and spangled background of the horizon.

"Young Powell, in the silence of the ship, reinforced by the great silent stillness of the world, said to himself that there was something mysterious in such beings as the absurd Franklin, and even in such beings as himself. It was a strange and almost improper thought to occur to the officer of the watch of a ship on the high seas on no matter how quiet a night. Why on earth was he bothering his head? Why couldn't he dismiss all these people from his mind? It was as if the mate had infected him with his own diseased devotion. He would not have believed it possible that he should be so foolish. But he was—clearly. He was foolish in a way totally unforeseen by himself. Pushing this self-analysis further, he reflected that the springs of his conduct were just as obscure.

"'I may be catching myself any time doing things

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of which I have no conception,' he thought. And as he was passing near the mizzen-mast he perceived a coil of rope left lying on the deck by the oversight of the sweepers. By an impulse which had nothing mysterious in it, he stooped as he went by with the intention of picking it up and hanging it up on its proper pin. This movement brought his head down to the level of the glazed end of the after skylight—the lighted skylight of the most private part of the saloon, consecrated to the exclusiveness of Captain Anthony's married life; the part, let me remind you, cut off from the rest of that forbidden space by a pair of heavy curtains. I mention these curtains because at this point Mr. Powell himself recalled the existence of that unusual arrangement to my mind.

"He recalled them with simple-minded compunction at that distance of time. He said: 'You understand that directly I stooped to pick up that coil of running gear—the spanker foot-outhaul, it was—I perceived that I could see right into that part of the saloon the curtains were meant to make particularly private. Do you understand me?' he insisted.

"I told him that I understood; and he proceeded to call my attention to the wonderful linking up of small facts, with something of awe left yet, after all these years, at the precise workmanship of chance, fate, providence, call it what you will! 'For, observe, Marlow,'

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he said, making at me very round eyes which contrasted funnily with the austere touch of grey on his temples, 'observe, my dear fellow, that everything depended on the men who cleared up the poop in the evening leaving that coil of rope on the deck, and on the topsail-tie carrying away in a most incomprehensible and surprising manner earlier in the day, and the end of the chain whipping round the coaming and shivering to bits the coloured glass-pane at the end of the skylight. It had the arms of the city of Liverpool on it; I don't know why unless because the *Ferndale* was registered in Liverpool. It was very thick plate glass. Anyhow, the upper part got smashed, and directly we had attended to things aloft Mr. Franklin had set the carpenter to patch up the damage with some pieces of plain glass. I don't know where they got them; I think the people who fitted up new bookcases in the Captain's room had left some spare panes. Chips was there the whole afternoon on his knees, messing with putty and red-lead. It wasn't a neat job when it was done, not by any means, but it would serve to keep the weather out and let the light in. Clear glass. And of course I was not thinking of it. I just stooped to pick up that rope and found my head within three inches of that clear glass, and—dash it all! I found myself out. Not half an hour before I was saying to myself that it was impossible to tell what was in people's heads or at the back of their talk, or

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what they were likely to be up to. And here I found myself up to as low a trick as you can well think of. For, after I had stooped, there I remained prying, spying, anyway looking, where I had no business to look. Not consciously at first, may be. He who has eyes, you know, nothing can stop him from seeing things as long as there are things to see in front of him. What I saw at first was the end of the table and the tray clamped onto it, a patent tray for sea use, fitted with holders for a couple of decanters, water-jug and glasses. The glitter of these things caught my eye first; but what I saw next was the Captain down there, alone as far as I could see; and I could see pretty well the whole of that part up to the cottage piano, dark against the satinwood panelling of the bulkhead. And I remained looking. I did. And I don't know that I was ashamed of myself either, then. It was the fault of that Franklin, always talking of the man, making free with him to that extent that really he seemed to have become our property, his and mine, in a way. It's funny, but one had that feeling about Captain Anthony. To watch him was not so much worse than listening to Franklin talking him over. Well, it's no use making excuses for what's inexcusable. I watched; but I daresay you know that there could have been nothing inimical in this low behaviour of mine. On the contrary. I'll tell you now what he was doing. He was helping himself out of a decanter. I

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saw every movement, and I said to myself mockingly as though jeering at Franklin in my thoughts, "Hallo! Here's the Captain taking to drink at last." He poured a little brandy or whatever it was into a long glass, filled it with water, drank about a fourth of it and stood the glass back into the holder. Every sign of a bad drinking bout, I was saying to myself, feeling quite amused at the notions of that Franklin. He seemed to me an enormous ass, with his jealousy and his fears. At that rate a month would not have been enough for anybody to get drunk. The Captain sat down in one of the swivel armchairs fixed around the table; I had him right under me and as he turned the chair slightly, I was looking, I may say, down his back. He took another little sip and then reached for a book which was lying on the table. I had not noticed it before. Altogether the proceedings of a desperate drunkard—weren't they? He opened the book and held it before his face. If this was the way he took to drink, then I needn't worry. He was in no danger from that, and as to any other, I assure you no human being could have looked safer than he did down there. I felt the greatest contempt for Franklin just then, while I looked at Captain Anthony sitting there with a glass of weak brandy and water at his elbow and reading in the cabin of his ship, on a quiet night—the quietest, perhaps the finest, of a prosperous passage. And if you wonder why I didn't

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leave off my ugly spying I will tell you how it was. Captain Anthony was a great reader just about that time; and I, too, I have a great liking for books. To this day I can't come near a book but I must know what it is about. It was a thickish volume he had there, small close print, double columns—I can see it now. What I wanted to make out was the title at the top of the page. I have very good eyes but he wasn't holding it conveniently—I mean for me up there. Well, it was a history of some kind, that much I read and then suddenly he bangs the book face down on the table, jumps up as if something had bitten him and walks away aft.

"'Funny thing shame is. I had been behaving badly and aware of it in a way, but I didn't feel really ashamed till the fright of being found out in my honourable occupation drove me from it. I slunk away to the forward end of the poop and lounged about there, my face and ears burning and glad it was a dark night, expecting every moment to hear the Captain's footsteps behind me. For I made sure he was coming on deck. Presently I thought I had rather meet him face to face and I walked slowly aft prepared to see him emerge from the companion before I got that far. I even thought of his having detected me by some means. But it was impossible, unless he had eyes in the top of his head. I had never had a view of his face down there.

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It was impossible; I was safe; and I felt very mean, yet, explain it as you may, I seemed not to care. And the Captain not appearing on deck, I had the impulse to go on being mean. I wanted another peep. I really don't know what was the beastly influence except that Mr. Franklin's talk was enough to demoralise any man by raising a sort of unhealthy curiosity which did away in my case with all the restraints of common decency.

"'I did not mean to run the risk of being caught squatting in a suspicious attitude by the Captain. There was also the helmsman to consider. So what I did—I am surprised at my low cunning—was to sit down naturally on the skylight-seat and then by bending forward I found that, as I expected, I could look down through the upper part of the end-pane. The worst that could happen to me then, if I remained too long in that position, was to be suspected by the seaman aft at the wheel of having gone to sleep there. For the rest my ears would give me sufficient warning of any movements in the companion.

"'But in that way my angle of view was changed. The field too was smaller. The end of the table, the tray and the swivel-chair I had right under my eyes. The Captain had not come back yet. The piano I could not see now; but on the other hand I had a very oblique downward view of the curtains drawn across the cabin and cutting off the forward part of it just about

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the level of the skylight-end and only an inch or so from the end of the table. They were heavy stuff, travelling on a thick brass rod with some contrivance to keep the rings from sliding to and fro when the ship rolled. But just then the ship was as still almost as a model shut up in a glass case while the curtains, joined closely, and, perhaps on purpose, made a little too long, moved no more than a solid wall.'"

Marlow got up to get another cigar. The night was getting on to what I may call its deepest hour, the hour most favourable to evil purposes of men's hate, despair or greed—to whatever can whisper into their ears the unlawful counsels of protest against things that are; the hour of ill-omened silence and chill and stagnation, the hour when the criminal plies his trade and the victim of sleeplessness reaches the lowest depth of dreadful discouragement; the hour before the first sight of dawn. I know it, because while Marlow was crossing the room I looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. He however never looked that way though it is possible that he, too, was aware of the passage of time. He sat down heavily.

"Our friend Powell," he began again, "was very anxious that I should understand the topography of that cabin. I was interested more by its moral atmosphere, that tension of falsehood, of desperate acting, which

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tainted the pure sea-atmosphere into which the magnanimous Anthony had carried off his conquest and—well—his self-conquest too, trying to act at the same time like a beast of prey, a pure spirit and the 'most generous of men.' Too big an order clearly because he was nothing of a monster but just a common mortal, a little more self-willed and self-confident than most, may be, both in his roughness and in his delicacy.

"As to the delicacy of Mr. Powell's proceedings I'll say nothing. He found a sort of depraved excitement in watching an unconscious man—and such an attractive and mysterious man as Captain Anthony at that. He wanted another peep at him. He surmised that the Captain must come back soon because of the glass two-thirds full and also of the book put down so brusquely. God knows what sudden pang had made Anthony jump up so. I am convinced he used reading as an opiate against the pain of his magnanimity which like all abnormal growths was gnawing at his healthy substance with cruel persistence. Perhaps he had rushed into his cabin simply to groan freely in absolute and delicate secrecy. At any rate he tarried there. And young Powell would have grown weary and compunctious at last if it had not become manifest to him that he had not been alone in the highly incorrect occupation of watching the movements of Captain Anthony.

"Powell explained to me that no sound did or per-

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haps could reach him from the saloon. The first sign —and we must remember that he was using his eyes for all they were worth—was an unaccountable movement of the curtain. It was wavy and very slight; just perceptible in fact to the sharpened faculties of a secret watcher; for it can't be denied that our wits are much more alert when engaged in wrong-doing (in which one mustn't be found out) than in a righteous occupation.

"He became suspicious, with no one and nothing definite in his mind. He was suspicious of the curtain itself and observed it. It looked very innocent. Then just as he was ready to put it down to a trick of imagination he saw trembling movements where the two curtains joined. Yes! Somebody else besides himself had been watching Captain Anthony. He owns artlessly that this roused his indignation. It was really too much of a good thing. In this state of intense antagonism he was startled to observe tips of fingers fumbling with the dark stuff. Then they grasped the edge of the further curtain and hung on there, just fingers and knuckles and nothing else. It made an abominable sight. He was looking at it with unaccountable repulsion when a hand came into view; a short, puffy, old, freckled hand projecting into the lamplight, followed by a white wrist, an arm in a grey coat-sleeve, up to the elbow, beyond the elbow, extended tremblingly towards the tray. Its ap-

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pearance was weird and nauseous, fantastic and silly. But instead of grabbing the bottle as Powell expected, this hand, tremulous with senile eagerness, swerved to the glass, rested on its edge for a moment (or so it looked from above) and went back with a jerk. The gripping fingers of the other hand vanished at the same time, and young Powell staring at the motionless curtains could indulge for a moment the notion that he had been dreaming.

"But that notion did not last long. Powell, after repressing his first impulse to spring for the companion and hammer at the Captain's door, took steps to have himself relieved by the boatswain. He was in a state of distraction as to his feelings and yet lucid as to his mind. He remained on the skylight so as to keep his eye on the tray.

"Still the Captain did not appear in the saloon. 'If he had,' said Mr. Powell, 'I knew what to do. I would have put my elbow through the pane instantly—crash."

"I asked him why?

"'It was the quickest dodge for getting him away from that tray,' he explained. 'My throat was so dry that I didn't know if I could shout loud enough. And this was not a case for shouting, either.'

"The boatswain, sleepy and disgusted, arriving on

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the poop, found the second officer doubled up over the end of the skylight in a pose which might have been that of severe pain. And his voice was so changed that the man, though naturally vexed at being turned out, made no comment on the plea of sudden indisposition which young Powell put forward.

"The rapidity with which the sick man got off the poop must have astonished the boatswain. But Powell, at the moment he opened the door leading into the saloon from the quarter-deck, had managed to control his agitation. He entered swiftly but without noise and found himself in the dark part of the saloon, the strong sheen of the lamp on the other side of the curtains visible only above the rod on which they ran. The door of Mr. Smith's cabin was in that dark part. He passed by it assuring himself by a quick side glance that it was imperfectly closed. 'Yes,' he said to me. 'The old man must have been watching through the crack. Of that I am certain; but it was not for me that he was watching and listening. Horrible! Surely he must have been startled to hear and see somebody he did not expect. He could not possibly guess why I was coming in, but I suppose he must have been concerned.' Concerned indeed! He must have been thunderstruck, appalled.

"Powell's only distinct aim was to remove the suspected tumbler. He had no other plan, no other

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intention, no other thought. Do away with it in some manner. Snatch it up and run out with it.

"You know that complete mastery of one fixed idea, not a reasonable but an emotional mastery, a sort of concentrated exaltation. Under its empire men rush blindly through fire and water and opposing violence, and nothing can stop them—unless, sometimes, a grain of sand. For his blind purpose (and clearly the thought of Mrs. Anthony was at the bottom of it) Mr. Powell had plenty of time. What checked him at the crucial moment was the familiar, harmless aspect of common things, the steady light, the open book on the table, the solitude, the peace, the home-like effect of the place. He held the glass in his hand; all he had to do was to vanish back beyond the curtains, flee with it noiselessly into the night on deck, fling it unseen overboard. A minute or less. And then all that would have happened would have been the wonder at the utter disappearance of a glass tumbler, a ridiculous riddle in pantry-affairs beyond the wit of anyone on board to solve. The grain of sand against which Powell stumbled in his headlong career was a moment of incredulity as to the truth of his own conviction because it had failed to affect the safe aspect of familiar things. He doubted his eyes too. He must have dreamt it all! 'I am dreaming now,' he said to himself. And very likely for a few seconds he must have looked like a man in

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a trance or profoundly asleep on his feet, and with a glass of brandy and water in his hand.

"What woke him up and, at the same time, fixed his feet immovably to the spot, was a voice asking him what he was doing there in tones of thunder. Or so it sounded to his ears. Anthony, opening the door of his stern-cabin had naturally exclaimed. What else could you expect? And the exclamation must have been fairly loud if you consider the nature of the sight which met his eye. There, before him, stood his second officer, a seemingly decent, well-bred young man, who, being on duty, had left the deck and had sneaked into the saloon, apparently for the inexpressibly mean purpose of drinking up what was left of his captain's brandy-and-water. There he was, caught absolutely with the glass in his hand.

"But the very monstrosity of appearances silenced Anthony after the first exclamation; and young Powell felt himself pierced through and through by the overshadowed glance of his captain. Anthony advanced quietly. The first impulse of Mr. Powell, when discovered, had been to dash the glass on the deck. He was in a sort of panic. But deep down within him his wits were working, and the idea that if he did that he could prove nothing and that the story he had to tell was completely incredible, restrained him. The Captain came forward slowly. With his eyes now close to his,

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Powell, spell-bound, numb all over, managed to lift one finger to the deck above mumbling the explanatory words, 'Boatswain on the poop.'

"The Captain moved his head slightly as much as to say, 'That's all right'—and this was all. Powell had no voice, no strength. The air was unbreathable, thick, sticky, odious, like hot jelly in which all movements became difficult. He raised the glass a little with immense difficulty and moved his trammelled lips sufficiently to form the words:

"'Doctored.'

"Anthony glanced at it for an instant, only for an instant, and again fastened his eyes on the face of his second mate. Powell added a fervent 'I believe' and put the glass down on the tray. The Captain's glance followed the movement and returned sternly to his face. The young man pointed a finger once more upwards and squeezed out of his iron-bound throat six consecutive words of further explanation. 'Through the skylight. The white pane.'

"The Captain raised his eyebrows very much at this, while young Powell, ashamed but desperate, nodded insistently several times. He meant to say that: Yes. Yes. He had done that thing. He had been spying. . . . The Captain's gaze became thoughtful. And, now the confession was over, the iron-bound feeling of Powell's throat passed away giving place to a general

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anxiety which from his breast seemed to extend to all the limbs and organs of his body. His legs trembled a little, his vision was confused, his mind became blankly expectant. But he was alert enough. At a movement of Anthony he screamed in a strangled whisper.

"'Don't, sir! Don't touch it.'

"The Captain pushed aside Powell's extended arm, took up the glass and raised it slowly against the lamplight. The liquid, of very pale amber colour, was clear, and by a glance the Captain seemed to call Powell's attention to the fact. Powell tried to pronounce the word, 'dissolved' but he only thought of it with great energy which however failed to move his lips. Only when Anthony had put down the glass and turned to him he recovered such a complete command of his voice that he could keep it down to a hurried, forcible whisper—a whisper that shook him.

"'Doctored! I swear it! I have seen. Doctored! I have seen.'

"Not a feature of the Captain's face moved. His was a calm to take one's breath away. It did so to young Powell. Then for the first time Anthony made himself heard to the point.

"'You did! . . . Who was it?'

"And Powell gasped freely at last. 'A hand,' he

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whispered fearfully, 'a hand and the arm—only the arm —like that.'

"He advanced his own, slow, stealthy, tremulous in faithful reproduction, the tips of two fingers and the thumb pressed together and hovering above the glass for an instant—then the swift jerk back, after the deed.

"'Like that,' he repeated growing excited. 'From behind this.' He grasped the curtain and glaring at the silent Anthony flung it back disclosing the forepart of the saloon. There was no one to be seen.

"Powell had not expected to see anybody. 'But,' he said to me, 'I knew very well there was an ear listening and an eye glued to the crack of a cabin door. Awful thought. And that door was in that part of the saloon remaining in the shadow of the other half of the curtain. I pointed at it and I suppose that old man inside saw me pointing. The Captain had a wonderful self-command. You couldn't have guessed anything from his face. Well, it was perhaps more thoughtful than usual. And indeed this was something to think about. But I couldn't think steadily. My brain would give a sort of jerk and then go dead again. I had lost all notion of time, and I might have been looking at the Captain for days and months for all I knew before I heard him whisper to me fiercely: 'Not a word!' This jerked me out of that trance I was in and I said 'No! No! I didn't mean even you.'

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"'I wanted to explain my conduct, my intentions, but I read in his eyes that he understood me and I was only too glad to leave off. And there we were looking at each other, dumb, brought up short by the question "What next?"'

"'I thought Captain Anthony was a man of iron till I saw him suddenly fling his head to the right and to the left fiercely, like a wild animal at bay not knowing which way to break out. . . .'

"Truly," commented Marlow, "brought to bay was not a bad comparison; a better one than Mr. Powell was aware of. At that moment the appearance of Flora could not but bring the tension to the breaking point. She came out in all innocence but not without vague dread. Anthony's exclamation on first seeing Powell had reached her in her cabin, where, it seems, she was brushing her hair. She had heard the very words. 'What are you doing here?' And the unwonted loudness of the voice—his voice—breaking the habitual stillness of that hour would have startled a person having much less reason to be constantly apprehensive, than the captive of Anthony's masterful generosity. She had no means to guess to whom the question was addressed and it echoed in her heart, as Anthony's voice always did. Followed complete silence. She waited, anxious, expectant, till she could stand the strain no

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longer, and with the weary mental appeal of the overburdened. 'My God! What is it now?' she opened the door of her room and looked into the saloon. Her first glance fell on Powell. For a moment, seeing only the second officer with Anthony, she felt relieved and made as if to draw back; but her sharpened perception detected something suspicious in their attitudes, and she came forward slowly.

"'I was the first to see Mrs. Anthony,' related Powell, 'because I was facing aft. The Captain, noticing my eyes, looked quickly over his shoulder and at once put his finger to his lips to caution me. As if I were likely to let out anything before her! Mrs. Anthony had on a dressing-gown of some grey stuff with red facings and a thick red cord round her waist. Her hair was down. She looked a child; a pale-faced child with big blue eyes and a red mouth a little open showing a glimmer of white teeth. The light fell strongly on her as she came up to the end of the table. A strange child though; she hardly affected one like a child, I remember. Do you know,' exclaimed Mr. Powell, who clearly must have been, like many seamen, an industrious reader, 'do you know what she looked like to me with those big eyes and something appealing in her whole expression. She looked like a forsaken elf. Captain Anthony had moved towards her to keep her away from my end of the table, where the tray was. I had never

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seen them so near to each other before, and it made a great contrast. It was wonderful, for, with his beard cut to a point, his swarthy, sunburnt complexion, thin nose and his lean head there was something African, something Moorish in Captain Anthony. His neck was bare; he had taken off his coat and collar and had drawn on his sleeping jacket in the time that he had been absent from the saloon. I seem to see him now. Mrs. Anthony too. She looked from him to me—I suppose I looked guilty or frightened—and from me to him, trying to guess what there was between us two. Then she burst out with a "What has happened?" which seemed addressed to me. I mumbled "Nothing! Nothing, ma'am," which she very likely did not hear.'

"'You must not think that all this had lasted a long time. She had taken fright at our behaviour and turned to the Captain pitifully. "What is it you are concealing from me?" A straight question—eh? I don't know what answer the Captain would have made. Before he could even raise his eyes to her she cried out "Ah! Here's papa!" in a sharp tone of relief, but directly afterwards she looked to me as if she were holding her breath with apprehension. I was so interested in her that, how shall I say it, her exclamation made no connection in my brain at first. I also noticed that she had sidled up a little nearer to Captain

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Anthony, before it occurred to me to turn my head. I can tell you my neck stiffened in the twisted position from the shock of actually seeing that old man! He had dared! I suppose you think I ought to have looked upon him as mad. But I couldn't. It would have been certainly easier. But I could *not*. You should have seen him. First of all he was completely dressed with his very cap still on his head just as when he left me on deck two hours before, saying in his soft voice: "The moment has come to go to bed"—while he meant to go and do that thing and hide in his dark cabin, and watch the stuff do its work. A cold shudder ran down my back. He had his hands in the pockets of his jacket, his arms were pressed close to his thin, upright body, and he shuffled across the cabin with his short steps. There was a red patch on each of his old soft cheeks as if somebody had been pinching them. He drooped his head a little, and looked with a sort of underhand expectation at the Captain and Mrs. Anthony standing close together at the other end of the saloon. The calculating horrible impudence of it! His daughter was there; and I am certain he had seen the Captain putting his finger on his lips to warn me. And then he had coolly come out! He passed my imagination, I assure you. After that one shiver his presence killed every faculty in me—wonder, horror, indignation. I felt nothing in particular just as if he were still the old

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gentleman who used to talk to me familiarly every day on deck. Would you believe it?'

"Mr. Powell challenged my powers of wonder at this internal phenomenon," went on Marlow after a slight pause. "But even if they had not been fully engaged, together with all my powers of attention in following the facts of the case, I should not have been astonished by his statements about himself. Taking into consideration his youth they were by no means incredible; or, at any rate, they were the least incredible part of the whole. They were also the least interesting part. The interest was elsewhere, and there of course all he could do was to look at the surface. The inwardness of what was passing before his eyes was hidden from him, who had looked on, more impenetrably than from me who at a distance of years was listening to his words. What presently happened at this crisis in Flora de Barral's fate was beyond his power of comment, seemed in a sense natural. And his own presence on the scene was so strangely motived that it was left for me to marvel alone at this young man, a completely chance-comer, having brought it about on that night.

"Each situation created either by folly or wisdom has its psychological moment. The behaviour of young Powell with its mixture of boyish impulses combined with instinctive prudence, had not created it—I can't say that—but had discovered it to the very people in-

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volved. What would have happened if he had made a noise about his discovery? But he didn't. His head was full of Mrs. Anthony and he behaved with a discretion beyond his years. Some nice children often do; and surely it is not from reflection. They have their own inspirations. Young Powell's inspiration consisted in being 'enthusiastic' about Mrs. Anthony. 'Enthusiastic' is really good. And he was amongst them like a child, sensitive, impressionable, plastic—but unable to find for himself any sort of comment.

"I don't know how much mine may be worth; but I believe that just then the tension of the false situation was at its highest. (Of all the forms offered to us by life it is the one demanding a couple to realise it fully, which is the most imperative. Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the—the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom—or even a straight if despairing decision.)

"Powell on taking his eyes off the old gentleman

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noticed Captain Anthony, swarthy as an African, by the side of Flora whiter than the lilies, take his handkerchief out and wipe off his forehead the sweat of anguish—like a man who is overcome. 'And no wonder,' commented Mr. Powell here. Then the Captain said, 'Hadn't you better go back to your room.' This was to Mrs. Anthony. He tried to smile at her. 'Why do you look startled? This night is like any other night.'

"'Which,' Powell again commented to me earnestly, 'was a lie. . . . No wonder he sweated.' You see from this the value of Powell's comments. Mrs. Anthony then said: 'Why are you sending me away?'

"'Why! That you should go to sleep. That you should rest.' And Captain Anthony frowned. Then sharply, 'You stay here, Mr. Powell. I shall want you presently.'

"As a matter of fact Powell had not moved. Flora did not mind his presence. He himself had the feeling of being of no account to those three people. He was looking at Mrs. Anthony as unabashed as the proverbial cat looking at a king. Mrs. Anthony glanced at him. She did not move, gripped by an inexplicable premonition. She had arrived at the very limit of her endurance as the object of Anthony's magnanimity; she was the prey of an intuitive dread of she did not know what mysterious influence; she felt herself being pushed back into that solitude, that moral loneliness, which had made

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all her life intolerable. And then, in that close communion established again with Anthony, she felt—as on that night in the garden—the force of his personal fascination. The passive quietness with which she looked at him gave her the appearance of a person bewitched—or, say, mesmerically put to sleep—beyond any notion of her surroundings.

"After telling Mr. Powell not to go away the Captain remained silent. Suddenly Mrs. Anthony pushed back her loose hair with a decisive gesture of her arms and moved still nearer to him. 'Here's papa up yet,' she said, but she did not look towards Mr. Smith. 'Why is it? And you? I can't go on like this, Roderick—between you two. Don't.'

"Anthony interrupted her as if something had untied his tongue.

"'Oh yes. Here's your father. And . . . Why not. Perhaps it is just as well you came out. Between us two? Is that it? I won't pretend I don't understand. I am not blind. But I can't fight any longer for what I haven't got. I don't know what you imagine has happened. Something has though. Only you needn't be afraid. No shadow can touch you—because I give up. I can't say we had much talk about it, your father and I, but, the long and the short of it is, that I must learn to live without you—which I have told you was impossible. I was speaking the truth. But

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I have done fighting, or waiting, or hoping. Yes. You shall go.'

"At this point Mr. Powell who (he confessed to me) was listening with uncomprehending awe, heard behind his back a triumphant chuckling sound. It gave him the shudders, he said, to mention it now; but at the time, except for another chill down the spine, it had not the power to destroy his absorption in the scene before his eyes, and before his ears too, because just then Captain Anthony raised his voice grimly. Perhaps he too had heard the chuckle of the old man.

"'Your father has found an argument which makes me pause, if it does not convince me. No! I can't answer it. I—I don't want to answer it. I simply surrender. He shall have his way with you —and with me. Only,' he added in a gloomy lowered tone which struck Mr. Powell as if a pedal had been put down, 'only it shall take a little time. I have never lied to you. Never. I renounce not only my chance but my life. In a few days, directly we get into port, the very moment we do, I, who have said I could never let you go, I shall let you go.'

"To the innocent beholder Anthony seemed at this point to become physically exhausted. My view is that the utter falseness of his, I may say, aspirations,

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the vanity of grasping the empty air, had come to him with an overwhelming force, leaving him disarmed before the other's mad and sinister sincerity. As he had said himself he could not fight for what he did not possess; he could not face such a thing as this for the sake of his mere magnanimity. The normal alone can overcome the abnormal. He could not even reproach that man over there. 'I own myself beaten,' he said in a firmer tone. 'You are free. I let you off since I must.'

"Powell, the onlooker, affirms that at these incomprehensible words Mrs. Anthony stiffened into the very image of astonishment, with a frightened stare and frozen lips. But next minute a cry came out from her heart, not very loud but of a quality which made not only Captain Anthony (he was not looking at her), not only him but also the more distant (and equally unprepared) young man, catch their breath: 'But I don't want to be let off,' she cried.

"She was so still that one asked oneself whether the cry had come from her. The restless shuffle behind Powell's back stopped short, the intermittent shadowy chuckling ceased too. Young Powell, glancing round, saw Mr. Smith raise his head with his faded eyes very still, puckered at the corners, like a man perceiving something coming at him from a great distance,

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And Mrs. Anthony's voice reached Powell's ears, entreating and indignant.

"'You can't cast me off like this, Roderick. I won't go away from you. I won't——'

"Powell turned about and discovered then that what Mr. Smith was puckering his eyes at, was the sight of his daughter clinging round Captain Anthony's neck—a sight not in itself improper, but which had the power to move young Powell with a bashfully profound emotion. It was different from his emotion while spying at the revelations of the skylight, but in this case too he felt the discomfort, if not the guilt, of an unseen beholder. Experience was being piled up on his young shoulders. Mrs. Anthony's hair hung back in a dark mass like the hair of a drowned woman. She looked as if she would let go and sink to the floor if the Captain were to withhold his sustaining arm. But the Captain obviously had no such intention. Standing firm and still he gazed with sombre eyes at Mr. Smith. For a time the low convulsive sobbing of Mr. Smith's daughter was the only sound to trouble the silence. The strength of Anthony's clasp pressing Flora to his breast could not be doubted even at that distance, and suddenly, awakening to his opportunity, he began to partly support her, partly carry her in the direction of her cabin. His head was bent over her solicitously, then recollecting himself, with a glance full of unwonted

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fire, his voice ringing in a note unknown to Mr. Powell, he cried to him, 'Don't you go on deck yet. I want you to stay down here till I come back. There are some instructions I want to give you.'

"And before the young man could answer, Anthony had disappeared in the stern cabin, burdened and exulting.

"'Instructions,' commented Mr. Powell. 'That was all right. Very likely; but they would be such instructions as, I thought to myself, no ship's officer perhaps had ever been given before. It made me feel a little sick to think what they would be dealing with, probably. But there! Everything that happens on board ship on the high seas has got to be dealt with somehow. There are no special people to fly to for assistance. And there I was with that old man left in my charge. When he noticed me looking at him he started to shuffle again athwart the saloon. He kept his hands rammed in his pockets, he was as stiff-backed as ever, only his head hung down. After a bit he says in his gentle soft tone: "Did you see it?"

"There were in Powell's head no special words to fit the horror of his feelings. So he said—he had to say something, 'Good God! What were you thinking of, Mr. Smith, to try to . . .' And then he left off. He dared not utter the awful word poison. Mr. Smith stopped his prowl.

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"'Think! What do you know of thinking. I don't think. There is something in my head that thinks. The thoughts in men, it's like being drunk with liquor or—— You can't stop them. A man who thinks will think anything. No! But have you seen it. Have you?'

"'I tell you I have! I am certain!' said Powell forcibly. 'I was looking at you all the time. You've done something to the drink in that glass.'

"Then Powell lost his breath somehow. Mr. Smith looked at him curiously, with mistrust.

"'My good young man, I don't know what you are talking about. I ask you—have you seen? Who would have believed it? with her arms round his neck. When! Oh! Ha! Ha! You did see! Didn't you? It wasn't a delusion—was it? Her arms round . . . But I have never wholly trusted her.'

"'Then I burst out at him,' said Mr. Powell. 'I told him he was jolly lucky to have fallen upon Captain Anthony. A man in a million. He started again shuffling to and fro. "You too," he said mournfully, keeping his eyes down. "Eh? Wonderful man? But have you a notion who I am? Listen! I have been the Great Mr. de Barral. So they printed it in the papers while they were getting up a conspiracy. And I have been doing time. And now I am brought low." His voice died down to a mere breath. "Brought low."

"'He took his hands out of his pocket, dragged the

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cap down on his head and stuck them back into his pockets, exactly as if preparing himself to go out into a great wind. "But not so low as to put up with this disgrace, to see her, fast in this fellow's clutches, without doing something. She wouldn't listen to me. Frightened? Silly? I had to think of some way to get her out of this. Did *you* think she cared for him? No! Would anybody have thought so? No! She pretended it was for my sake. She could'nt understand that if I hadn't been an old man I would have flown at his throat months ago. As it was I was tempted every time he looked at her. My girl. Ough! Any man but this. And all the time the wicked little fool was lying to me. It was their plot, their conspiracy! These conspiracies are the devil. She has been leading me on, till she has fairly put my head under the heel of that jailer, of that scoundrel, of her husband. . . . Treachery! Bringing me low. Lower than herself. In the dirt. That's what it means. Doesn't it? Under his heel!"

"He paused in his restless shuffle and again, seizing his cap with both hands, dragged it furiously right down on his ears. Powell had lost himself in listening to these broken ravings, in looking at that old feverish face when, suddenly, quick as lightning, Mr. Smith spun round, snatched up the Captain's glass and with a stifled, hurried exclamation, 'Here's luck,' tossed the liquor down his throat.

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"'I know now the meaning of the word "Consternation,"' went on Mr. Powell. 'That was exactly my state of mind. I thought to myself directly: There's nothing in that drink. I have been dreaming, I have made the awfullest mistake! . . .'

"Mr. Smith put the glass down. He stood before Powell unharmed, quieted down, in a listening attitude, his head inclined on one side, chewing his thin lips. Suddenly he blinked queerly, grabbed Powell's shoulder and collapsed, subsiding all at once as though he had gone soft all over, as a piece of silk stuff collapses. Powell seized his arm instinctively and checked his fall; but as soon as Mr. Smith was fairly on the floor he jerked himself free and backed away. Almost as quick he rushed forward again and tried to lift up the body. But directly he raised his shoulders he knew that the man was dead! Dead!

"He lowered him down gently. He stood over him without fear or any other feeling, almost indifferent, far away, as it were. And then he made another start and, if he had not kept Mrs. Anthony always in his mind, he would have let out a yell for help. He staggered to her cabin-door, and, as it was, his call for 'Captain Anthony' burst out of him much too loud; but he made a great effort of self-control. 'I am waiting for my orders, sir,' he said outside that door distinctly, in a steady tone.

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"It was very still in there; still as death. Then he heard a shuffle of feet and the Captain's voice 'All right. Coming.' He leaned his back against the bulkhead as you see a drunken man sometimes propped up against a wall, half doubled up. In that attitude the Captain found him, when he came out, pulling the door to after him quickly. At once Anthony let his eyes run all over the cabin. Powell, without a word, clutched his forearm, led him round the end of the table and began to justify himself. 'I couldn't stop him,' he whispered shakily. 'He was too quick for me. He drank it up and fell down.' But the Captain was not listening. He was looking down at Mr. Smith, thinking perhaps that it was a mere chance his own body was not lying there. They did not want to speak. They made signs to each other with their eyes. The captain grasped Powell's shoulder as if in a vice and glanced at Mrs. Anthony's cabin-door, and it was enough. He knew that the young man understood him. Rather! Silence! Silence for ever about this. Their very glances became stealthy. Powell looked from the body to the door of the dead man's state-room. The Captain nodded and let him go; and then Powell crept over, hooked the door open and crept back with fearful glances towards Mrs. Anthony's cabin. They stooped over the corpse. Captain Anthony lifted up the shoulders.

"Mr. Powell shuddered. 'I'll never forget that in-

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terminable journey across the saloon, step by step, holding our breath. For part of the way the drawn half of the curtain concealed us from view had Mrs. Anthony opened her door; but I didn't draw a free breath till after we laid the body down on the swinging cot. The reflection of the saloon light left most of the cabin in the shadow. Mr. Smith's rigid, extended body looked shadowy too, shadowy and alive. You know he always carried himself as stiff as a poker. We stood by the cot as though waiting for him to make us a sign that he wanted to be left alone. The Captain threw his arm over my shoulder and said in my very ear: "The steward'll find him in the morning."

"'I made no answer. It was for him to say. It was perhaps the best way. It's no use talking about my thoughts. They were not concerned with myself, nor yet with that old man who terrified me more now than when he was alive. Him whom I pitied was the Captain. He whispered: "I am certain of you, Mr. Powell. You had better go on deck now. As to me . . ." and I saw him raise his hands to his head as if distracted. But his last words before we stole out that cabin stick to my mind with the very tone of his mutter —to himself, not to me:

"'"No! No! I am not going to stumble now over that corpse."'

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. . . . .

"This is what our Mr. Powell had to tell me," said Marlow, changing his tone. I was glad to learn that Flora de Barral had been saved from *that* sinister shadow at least falling upon her path.

We sat silent then, my mind running on the end of de Barral, on the irresistible pressure of imaginary griefs, crushing conscience, scruples, prudence, under their ever-expanding volume: on the sombre and venomous irony in the obsession which had mastered that old man.

"Well," I said.

"'The steward found him,' Mr. Powell roused himself. 'He went in there with a cup of tea at five and of course dropped it. I was on watch again. He reeled up to me on deck pale as death. I had been expecting it; and yet I could hardly speak. "Go and tell the Captain quietly," I managed to say. He ran off muttering "My God! My God!" and I'm hanged if he didn't get hysterical while trying to tell the Captain, and start screaming in the saloon, "Fully dressed! Dead! Fully dressed!" Mrs. Anthony ran out of course but she didn't get hysterical. Franklin, who was there too, told me that she hid her face on the Captain's breast and then he went out and left them there. It was days before Mrs. Anthony was seen on deck. The first time I spoke to her she gave me

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her hand and said, "My poor father was quite fond of you, Mr. Powell." She started wiping her eyes and I fled to the other side of the deck. One would like to forget all this had ever come near her.'

"But clearly he could not, because after lighting his pipe he began musing aloud: 'Very strong stuff it must have been. I wonder where he got it. It could hardly be at a common chemist. Well, he had it from somewhere—a mere pinch it must have been, no more.'

"I have my theory," observed Marlow, "which to a certain extent does away with the added horror of a coldly premeditated crime. Chance had stepped in there too. It was not Mr. Smith who obtained the poison. It was the great de Barral. And it was not meant for the obscure, magnanimous conqueror of Flora de Barral; it was meant for the notorious financier whose enterprises had nothing to do with magnanimity. He had his physician in his days of greatness. I even seem to remember that the man was called at the trial on some small point or other. I can imagine that de Barral went to him when he saw, as he could hardly help seeing, the possibility of a 'triumph of envious rivals'—a heavy sentence.

"I doubt if for love or even for money, but I think possibly, from pity that man provided him with what Mr. Powell called 'strong stuff.' From what Powell saw

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of the very act I am fairly certain it must have been contained in a capsule and that he had it about him on the last day of his trial, perhaps secured by a stitch in his waistcoat pocket. He didn't use it. Why? Did he think of his child at the last moment? Was it want of courage? We can't tell. But he found it in his clothes when he came out of jail. It had escaped investigation if there was any. Chance had armed him. And chance alone, the chance of Mr. Powell's life, forced him to turn the abominable weapon against himself.

"I imparted my theory to Mr. Powell who accepted it at once as, in a sense, favourable to the father of Mrs. Anthony. Then he waved his hand. 'Don't let us think of it.'

"I acquiesced and very soon he observed dreamily:

"'I was with Captain and Mrs. Anthony sailing all over the world for near on six years. Almost as long as Franklin.'

"'Oh, yes! What about Franklin?' I asked.

"Powell smiled. 'He left the *Ferndale* a year or so afterwards, and I took his place. Captain Anthony recommended him for a command. You don't think Captain Anthony would chuck a man aside like an old glove. But of course Mrs. Anthony did not like him very much. I don't think she ever let out a whisper against him but Captain Anthony could read her thoughts.'

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"And again Powell seemed to lose himself in the past. I asked, for suddenly the vision of the Fynes passed through my mind.

"'Any children?'

"Powell gave a start. 'No! No! Never had any children,' and again subsided, puffing at his short briar pipe.

"'Where are they now?' I enquired next as if anxious to ascertain that all Fyne's fears had been misplaced and vain as our fears often are; that there were no undesirable cousins for his dear girls, no danger of intrusion on their spotless home. Powell looked round at me slowly, his pipe smouldering in his hand.

"'Don't you know?' he uttered in a deep voice.

"'Know what?'

"'That the *Ferndale* was lost this four years or more. Sunk. Collision. And Captain Anthony went down with her.'

"'You don't say so!' I cried quite affected as if I had known Captain Anthony personally. 'Was—was Mrs. Anthony lost too?'

"'You might as well ask if I was lost,' Mr. Powell rejoined so testily as to surprise me. 'You see me here, —don't you.'

"He was quite huffy, but noticing my wondering stare he smoothed his ruffled plumes. And in a musing tone:

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"'Yes. Good men go out as if there was no use for them in the world. It seems as if there were things that, as the Turks say, are written. Or else fate has a try and sometimes misses its mark. You remember that close shave we had of being run down at night, I told you of my first voyage with them. This go it was just at dawn. A flat calm and a fog thick enough to slice with a knife. Only there were no explosives on board. I was on deck and I remember the cursed, murderous thing looming up alongside and Captain Anthony (we were both on deck) calling out, "Good God! What's this! Shout for all hands, Powell, to save themselves. There's no dynamite on board now. I am going to get the wife!" . . . I yelled, all the watch on deck yelled. Crash!'

"Mr. Powell gasped at the recollection. 'It was a Belgian Green Star liner, the *Westland,*' he went on, 'commanded by one of those stop-for-nothing skippers. Flaherty was his name and I hope he will die without absolution. She cut half through the old *Ferndale* and after the blow there was a silence like death. Next I heard the Captain back on deck shouting, "Set your engines slow ahead," and a howl of "Yes, yes," answering him from her forecastle; and then a whole crowd of people up there began making a row in the fog. They were throwing ropes down to us in dozens, I must say. I and the Captain fastened one of them under

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Mrs. Anthony's arms: I remember she had a sort of dim smile on her face.'

"'"Haul up carefully," I shouted to the people on the steamer's deck. "You've got a woman on that line."'

"'The Captain saw her landed up there safe. And then we made a rush round our decks to see no one was left behind. As we got back the Captain says: "Here she's gone at last, Powell; the dear old thing! Run down at sea."'

"'"Indeed she is gone," I said. "But it might have been worse. Shin up this rope, sir, for God's sake. I will steady it for you."'

"'"What are you thinking about," he says angrily. "It isn't my turn. Up with you."'

"'These were the last words he ever spoke on earth I suppose. I knew he meant to be the last to leave his ship, so I swarmed up as quick as I could, and those damned lunatics up there grab at me from above, lug me in, drag me along aft through the row and the riot of the silliest excitement I ever did see. Somebody hails from the bridge, "Have you got them all on board?" and a dozen silly asses start yelling all together, "All saved! All saved," and then that accursed Irishman on the bridge, with me roaring "No! No!" till I thought my head would burst, rings his engines astern.

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He rings the engines astern—I fighting like mad to make myself heard! And of course . . .'

"I saw tears, a shower of them fall down Mr. Powell's face. His voice broke.

"'The *Ferndale* went down like a stone and Captain Anthony went down with her, the finest man's soul that ever left a sailor's body. I raved like a maniac, like a devil, with a lot of fools crowding round me and asking, "Aren't you the Captain?"'

"'"I wasn't fit to tie the shoe-strings of the man you have drowned," I screamed at them. . . . Well! Well! I could see for myself that it was no good lowering a boat. You couldn't have seen her alongside. No use. And only think, Marlow, it was I who had to go and tell Mrs. Anthony. They had taken her down below somewhere, first-class saloon. I had to go and tell her! That Flaherty, God forgive him, comes to me as white as a sheet, "I think you are the proper person." God forgive him. I wished to die a hundred times. A lot of kind ladies, passengers, were chattering excitedly around Mrs. Anthony—a real parrot house. The ship's doctor went before me. He whispers right and left and then there falls a sudden hush. Yes, I wished myself dead. But Mrs. Anthony was a brick.'

"Here Mr. Powell fairly burst into tears. 'No one could help loving Captain Anthony. I leave you to

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imagine what he was to her. Yet before the week was out it was she who was helping me to pull myself together.'

"'Is Mrs. Anthony in England now?' I asked after awhile.

"He wiped his eyes without any false shame. 'Oh, yes.' He began to look for matches, and while diving for the box under the table added: 'And not very far from here either. That little village up there — you know.'

"'No! Really! Oh, I see!'

"Mr. Powell smoked austerely, very detached. But I could not let him off like this. The sly beggar. So this was the secret of his passion for sailing about the river, the reason of his fondness for that creek.

"'And I suppose,' I said, 'that you are still as "enthusiastic" as ever. Eh? If I were you I would just mention my enthusiasm to Mrs. Anthony. Why not?'

"He caught his falling pipe neatly. But if what the French call *effarement* was ever expressed on a human countenance it was on this occasion, testifying to his modesty, his sensibility and his innocence. He looked afraid of somebody overhearing my audacious —almost sacrilegious hint—as if there had not been a mile and a half of lonely marshland and dykes between us and the nearest human habitation. And then

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perhaps he remembered the soothing fact for he allowed a gleam to light up his eyes, like the reflection of some inward fire tended in the sanctuary of his heart by a devotion as pure as that of any vestal.

"It flashed and went out. He smiled a bashful smile, sighed:

"'Pah! Foolishness. You ought to know better,' he said, more sad than annoyed. 'But I forgot that you never knew Captain Anthony,' he said indulgently.

"I reminded him that I knew Mrs. Anthony; even before he—an old friend now—had ever set eyes on her. And as he told me that Mrs. Anthony had heard of our meetings I wondered whether she would care to see me. Mr. Powell volunteered no opinion then; but next time we lay in the creek he said, 'She will be very pleased. You had better go to-day.'

"The afternoon was well advanced before I approached the cottage. The amenity of a fine day in its decline surrounded me with a beneficent, a calming influence; I felt it in the silence of the shady lane, in the pure air, in the blue sky. It is difficult to retain the memory of the conflicts, miseries, temptations and crimes of men's self-seeking existence when one is alone with the charming serenity of the unconscious nature. Breathing the dreamless peace around the picturesque cottage I was approaching, it seemed to

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me that it must reign everywhere, over all the globe of water and land and in the hearts of all the dwellers on this earth.

"Flora came down to the garden gate to meet me, no longer the perversely tempting, sorrowful, wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence. Neither did she look like a forsaken elf. I stammered out stupidly, 'Again in the country, Miss . . . Mrs. . . .' She was very good, returned the pressure of my hand, but we were slightly embarrassed. Then we laughed a little. Then we became grave.

"I am no lover of daybreaks. You know how thin, equivocal, is the light of the dawn. But she was now her true self, she was like a fine tranquil afternoon—and not so very far advanced either. A woman not much over thirty, with a dazzling complexion and a little colour, a lot of hair, a smooth brow, a fine chin, and only the eyes of the Flora of the old days, absolutely unchanged.

"In the room into which she led me we found a Miss Somebody — I didn't catch the name, — an unobtrusive, even an indistinct, middle-aged person in black. A companion. All very proper. She came and went and even sat down at times in the room, but a little apart, with some sewing. By the time

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she had brought in a lighted lamp I had heard all the details which really matter in this story. Between me and her who was once Flora de Barral the conversation was not likely to keep strictly to the weather.

"The lamp had a rosy shade; and its glow wreathed her in perpetual blushes, made her appear wonderfully young as she sat before me in a deep, high-backed arm-chair. I asked:

"'Tell me what is it you said in that famous letter which so upset Mrs. Fyne, and caused little Fyne to interfere in this offensive manner?'

"'It was simply crude,' she said earnestly. 'I was feeling reckless and I wrote recklessly. I knew she would disapprove and I wrote foolishly. It was the echo of her own stupid talk. I said that I did not love her brother but that I had no scruples whatever in marrying him.'

"She paused, hesitating, then with a shy half-laugh.

"'I really believed I was selling myself, Mr. Marlow. And I was proud of it. What I suffered afterwards I couldn't tell you; because I only discovered my love for my poor Roderick through agonies of rage and humiliation. I came to suspect him of despising me; but I could not put it to the test because of my father. Oh! I would not have been too proud. But I had to spare

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poor papa's feelings. Roderick was perfect, but I felt as though I were on the rack and not allowed even to cry out. Papa's prejudice against Roderick was my greatest grief. It was distracting. It frightened me. Oh! I have been miserable! That night when my poor father died suddenly I am certain they had some sort of discussion, about me. But I did not want to hold out any longer against my own heart! I could not.'

"She stopped short, then impulsively:

"'Truth will out, Mr. Marlow.'

"'Yes,' I said.

"She went on musingly.

"'Sorrow and happiness were mingled at first like darkness and light. For months I lived in a dusk of feelings. But it was quiet. It was warm . . .'

"Again she paused, then going back in her thoughts. 'No! There was no harm in that letter. It was simply foolish. What did I know of life then? Nothing. But Mrs. Fyne ought to have known better. She wrote a letter to her brother, a little later. Years afterwards Roderick allowed me to glance at it. I found in it this sentence: "For years I tried to make a friend of that girl; but I warn you once more that she has the nature of a heartless adventuress. . . ." Adventuress!' repeated Flora slowly. 'So be it. I have had a fine adventure.'

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"'It was fine, then,' I said interested.

"'The finest in the world! Only think! I loved and I was loved, untroubled, at peace, without remorse, without fear. All the world, all life were transformed for me. And how much I have seen! How good people were to me! Roderick was so much liked everywhere. Yes, I have known kindness and safety. The most familiar things appeared lighted up with a new light, clothed with a loveliness I had never suspected. The sea itself! . . . You are a sailor. You have lived your life on it. But do you know how beautiful it is, how strong, how charming, how friendly, how mighty . . .'

"I listened amazed and touched. She was silent only a little while.

"'It was too good to last. But nothing can rob me of it now. . . . Don't think that I repine. I am not even sad now. Yes, I have been happy. But I remember also the time when I was unhappy beyond endurance, beyond desperation. Yes. You remember that. And later on, too. There was a time on board the *Ferndale* when the only moments of relief I knew were when I made Mr. Powell talk to me a little on the poop. You like him?—Don't you?'

"'Excellent fellow,' I said warmly. 'You see him often?'

"'Of course. I hardly know another soul in the

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world. I am alone. And he has plenty of time on his hands. His aunt died a few years ago. He's doing nothing, I believe.'

"'He is fond of the sea,' I remarked. 'He loves it.'

"'He seems to have given it up,' she murmured.

"'I wonder why?'

"She remained silent. 'Perhaps it is because he loves something else better,' I went on. 'Come, Mrs. Anthony, don't let me carry away from here the idea that you are a selfish person, hugging the memory of your past happiness, like a rich man his treasure, forgetting the poor at the gate.'

"I rose to go, for it was getting late. She got up in some agitation and went out with me into the fragrant darkness of the garden. She detained my hand for a moment and then in the very voice of the Flora of old days, with the exact intonation, showing the old mistrust, the old doubt of herself, the old scar of the blow received in childhood, pathetic and funny, she murmured, 'Do you think it possible that he should care for me?'

"'Just ask him yourself. You are brave.'

"'Oh, I am brave enough,' she said with a sigh.

"'Then do. For if you don't you will be wronging that patient man cruelly.'

"I departed leaving her dumb. Next day, seeing Powell making preparations to go ashore, I asked him

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to give my regards to Mrs. Anthony. He promised he would.

"'Listen, Powell,' I said. 'We got to know each other by chance?'

"'Oh, quite!' he admitted, adjusting his hat.

"'And the science of life consists in seizing every chance that presents itself,' I pursued. 'Do you believe that?'

"'Gospel truth,' he declared innocently.

"'Well, don't forget it.'

"'Oh, I! I don't expect now anything to present itself,' he said, jumping ashore.

"He didn't turn up at high water. I set my sail and just as I had cast off from the bank, round the black barn, in the dusk, two figures appeared and stood silent, indistinct.

"'Is that you, Powell?' I hailed.

"'And Mrs. Anthony,' his voice came impressively through the silence of the great marsh. 'I am not sailing to-night. I have to see Mrs. Anthony home.'

"'Then I must even go alone,' I cried.

"Flora's voice wished me *'bon voyage'* in a most friendly but tremulous tone.

"'You shall hear from me before long,' shouted Powell, suddenly, just as my boat had cleared the mouth of the creek.

"This was yesterday," added Marlow, lolling in the

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armchair lazily. "I haven't heard yet; but I expect to hear any moment. . . . What on earth are you grinning at in this sarcastic manner? I am not afraid of going to church with a friend. Hang it all, for all my belief in Chance I am not exactly a pagan. . . ."

THE END.

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